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THE NEW FRENCH SOCIETY NOVEL.

# CHATEAU FRISSAC;

OR,

## HOME SCENES IN FRANCE.

By OLIVE LOGAN.

***

### Notices from leading English Journals.

The lively and pleasant volume entitled "Photographs of Paris Life," which appeared last year from the ready pen of this author, has prepared the way for agreeable anticipations of any further portraitures of French society by the same artist. Such expectations will not be disappointed by "Chateau Frissac," which is a lively *espiégle* story, characterized by an intimate knowledge of the arcana of French society and domestic manners, and not a little tinctured with the flippancy and the freedom of French style. * * * * * She presents Parisian society in all its charm; in all its brilliancy, taste, and tact. She accords the fullest meed of merit to all that will bear the investigation of truth, unbiased by expediency; but she has watched the symptoms of disease which mark the fell and fatal workings of the canker at the core, and she has no spurious toleration, but with a bold hand cuts into the centre of the "damned spot."—*The Morning Post.*

There is something corresponding to what the chemists call *volatile oil* in this lady's writing, which gives it a peculiar flavor of its own apart from any formal literary merits.—*The Spectator.*

There is a delightful vivacity and an ease in many of the conversational scenes with which this novelette abounds, which are eminently French. While reading the pages of "Chateau Frissac," we might almost fancy ourselves in one of the pleasantest of the Parisian *salons;* and although we cannot help feeling that the various human units introduced to our notice are individually by no means deserving of much sympathy, collectively we are bound to say they are for a time very amusing and pleasant company.—*The Critic.*

She has given us sketches of French society—not in Paris alone, described the ways and manners of fashionable people in their country houses in France. In the opening of the story, Hortense de Frissac had just attained her seventeenth year; she was tall and *svelte*, with small delicate hands and feet; she had large deep blue eyes, and long tresses of golden wavy hair, but there was no color in her cheeks..—*The Queen.*

That we know very little of our French neighbors, in spite of our occasional visits to Paris, is very clear, and it is equally clear that it would be to our advantage to know more of our pleasant and volatile neighbors. The author is just the person to tell English men and women how French men and women live. Her "Photographs of Paris Life" was a very successful book, and "Chateau Frissac" will—but it is dangerous to prophesy—ought—to be a greater favorite with the public. * * * Independently of the argument, the tale is worth reading, for the skill with which it is constructed, and for the knowledge of French society of the upper class which it pleasantly and gracefully imparts.—*The Illustrated News of the World.*

"Chateau Frissac" is a pleasant novelette, wittily written, and intended to show the evils of *mariages de convenance.*—*The Press.*

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# CHATEAU FRISSAC.

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# CHATEAU FRISSAC;

OR,

# HOME SCENES IN FRANCE.

BY

OLIVE LOGAN,

AUTHORESS OF "PHOTOGRAPHS OF PARIS LIFE,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

NEW YORK:
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY.
443 & 445 BROADWAY.
1865.

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# PREFACE.

THE very flattering reception extended to "Photographs of Paris Life," receiving as it did the patronage of the Empress herself, emboldened me to make another attempt in the difficult field of literature.

"Chateau Frissac" was written with a view of showing the evils resulting from the well-known French *mariage de convenance*, or, to translate freely, Reasonable Marriages, and for the purpose of deprecating a system which has not only become almost a law in France, but which is fast tainting with its pernicious influence even our own "fashionable society." If the perusal of my little work does but cause only one anxious mamma with marriageable daughters to pause and reflect on the impropriety of a union where affection does not reign supreme, I shall not have written these pages in vain.

O. L.

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The following is a copy of the letter received from the librarian of the Empress Eugènie:

"PALAIS DES TUILERIES, *le* 3 *Juillet*, 1861.
"MAISON DE L'IMPÉRATRICE.

"MADAME,—J'ai placé sons les yeux de l'Impératrice l'ouvrage intitulé "Photographs of Paris Life," dont vous êtes l'auteur.

"Sa Majesté a daigné accepter votre hommage et elle m'a chargé d'avoir l'honneur de vous exprimer ses remerciments.

"Veuillez, Madame, agréer l'assurance de mon respect. Le Bibliotecaire de sa Majesté,

"PH. DE ST. ALBIN."

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# CHATEAU FRISSAC.

## CHAPTER I.

### THE COUNTESS DE FRISSAC.

FOUR silvery notes had just emanated from a handsome clock, which stood on the chimney-piece of a large and beautifully furnished room, when a door was thrown hastily open to give entrance to a gentleman, dressed with all the elegance of the present day. He glanced quickly around, and seeing no one, seated himself with every sign of impatience and anxious disquietude. The room, I said, was large and beautifully furnished; but the furniture was of an ancient style, and the damask curtains, though rich and heavy, were somewhat faded by time. The *fauteuil* into which the Marquis (for such was his rank) had thrown himself, was covered with that miraculous loom painting called the Gobelin Tapestry. A rosy little shepherdess snatching an apple (ruddy cheeked as herself) from her amorous swain, is brought by the effort into such close contact with



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his yellow hanging locks, that he needs must steal a kiss withal. The adventures of this couple seem to have afforded the design for the entire furniture of the room, the sofa finishing the story by showing the little chapel in the distance, towards which the homely lovers are advancing, followed by a troup of their admiring friends. Time, which had faded the curtains, had given additional value to the paintings and statuary which adorned the room. A virgin by Raphael hung in a conspicuous place: a pure and holy light beamed from out those meek eyes, in spite of the accumulated dust of many years. Rich marbles there were too—time stained and yellow, but still beautiful. The clock upon which the Marquis turned his eyes, at intervals of every five minutes, was itself a masterpiece of art. It had, at one time, graced that gorgeous palace at Versailles—had adorned the private apartment of the king, who, when other eyes had charmed him, presented the once precious relic to the ancestor of the present owner of the house into which I have introduced my readers. The design of this clock was very beautiful; it represented Time, the bearded remorseless tyrant, passing before Beauty, leaving her unscathed and sovereign still of all—powerful even over monarchs. This was a delicate compliment to Madame de Pompadour, who, although at the time the bauble was made, had got far into her forties, still held undiminished sway over her royal lover. The

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figure of the Marchioness had been modelled from nature, and was considered so good a likeness, that as before stated, the king caused it to be placed in his own private chamber, where no rivals' eyes could gaze upon it. The lady was represented seated, her left arm reposing on a broken column, in the interior of which was placed the timepiece. Her dress was ornamented with diamonds, and on her head was placed a garland of flowers, composed of precious stones. The clock struck the quarters, and it was nearly five when the door by which the Marquis had entered was opened silently, and the figure of a lady appeared. The Marquis rose instantly, approached her, and, after making a formal bow, said:

"You are late, chère Comtesse."

"Yes," replied the lady; "I was detained, and even now, I fear, I shall not be able to give you a decided answer. In this affair I feel so entirely unaided that I hesitate before risking (for it is a risk, Marquis) my dear child's happiness."

"Can there be any doubt, Madame, of her happiness as my wife? As Marquise de Claremont Brezè?"

"She is so young, Marquis. She knows nothing of the world."

"Nor should she, being as yet little more than seventeen," replied the gentleman; "but tell me, Madame, have you not mentioned the subject to the Count?"

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"Since you spoke to him yourself, Marquis, I have had scarcely a moment's private conversation with my husband; his duties to our guests, his occupations, are so great—"

"So great that they do not leave him time to think or speak of the marriage of his only child?"

"The Count has left her so entirely to my care that I presume he thinks I can arrange this important matter, as I chose her governess, her playmates, her friends."

"And it is for that reason, Madame, that I have dared to solicit this interview, and now beg you to say whether or not I may aspire to the honour of becoming your son-in-law."

"I cannot really, as yet, reply. Leave me now, Marquis, and I promise you, that two weeks from to-day I will give you my final response. Be in this room at this hour, a fortnight hence, and you will find me waiting for you."

"Be it so, Madame; I bow to your behests, but remember the answer must then be decisive; either I must be able to call your lovely daughter mine, Countess, or I must chase from my bosom all hope."

The Countess inclined her head, in token both of assent and salutation to her departing guest. She watched his retreating figure as he passed through the long rooms which formed *suite* to the one in which she stood; the mirrors reflected him on every side, till at last the large door which gave upon the

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grand staircase was thrown open by a lacquey, and the Marquis had departed. The Countess stood undecided in the deep embrasure of the window. Her thoughts were apparently not pleasant, for from time to time she heaved deep sighs, and had it not been that more than once her handkerchief was passed quickly over her face, tears might have been seen on those yet blooming cheeks. Yet blooming! For in spite of her having a marriageable daughter, the Countess de Frissac had only just entered her thirty-sixth year. She emerged from the doors of a convent to enter those of a church; as was, is, and ever will be, I fear, the custom in France with people of her class. The marriage took place on her eighteenth birthday. She had seen her bridegroom but three times before the orange blossoms were placed upon her brow—three times—and then she stood before the altar, swearing to love, honour, and obey him. The Count was about fifteen years older than his bride, but so handsome was he, so full of life and health, that a looker-on would have thought him nearer twenty-eight than thirty-four years of age. In spite of her slight acquaintance with him, previous to her marriage, the young bride went to her lord with no callous breast. She had seen him three times. Three times had his handsome eyes looked full into hers, and seemed to contain that wealth of love for which every young girl sighs. The day then that saw her Countess de Frissac, made her a happy woman; for though

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she was not deeply in love, she believed that further knowledge of and acquaintance with her husband, would cause her to become so. "Does he or does he not love me?" she asked herself a hundred times before they had been married as many days. If he did not, why had he married her? She was young, handsome, accomplished—but so was he, handsomer, more accomplished *she* thought, than herself. Why should he have married her, if not for love? The question was answered one day, when the poor, fond, affectionate wife, at last roused by neglect and cold treatment, remonstrated—nay even tried to command. He answered her brusquely enough too, then left her to mourn over the wreck of her hopes—a happy wifehood. Fair exchange is not robbery—for her broad acres in the *Limousin*, she had received his title. Was it not fair? What if she had given her young heart, her best hopes, and he had given nothing? Women often sacrifice themselves in marrying,—and then he was not unkind to her. It were unreasonable to ask for more. Not long after the great question which had tormented the poor wife for two years, was settled by his hasty answer, and she was left to pine in silence, a new hope dawned for her. Her child, according to French custom, had been taken directly after its birth to the humble abode of a nurse, who lived not far from their own country place. She would do a mother's duty by this child; she would quit the gay world which pos-

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sessed no charms for her. She determined to leave Paris at once, and go to their chateau with the nurse and the child, or if that was not agreeable to the Count, she would at least visit the nurse's place as often as possible, to see that dear being, whose existence was already beginning to make her take an interest in and cling to her own. She would certainly endeavour to persuade her husband to leave Paris and reside at Chateau Frissac. But this plan was not feasible, according to the Count's idea. "What," said he, "leave Paris now? In the height of the season? Go to that great cold chateau—without even neighbours, at this time of the year; and for what? to see a baby! a little senseless thing that liked the nurse, and would like her for years to come better that it did them. No, it was impossible, at least at present."

The Countess ventured to ask when it would be possible. "Not before September—yes, September he thought would be the very earliest—as he had to spend May and June in London, and July and August were to be passed at the sea-side by advice of his physician." September! and they were now in January. Eight months! She tried to remonstrate; it was not right, she said, to leave their child so entirely to the care of a nurse. "Not to the care of Janette?" replied the Count. "A woman whose family has occupied the same cottage for years? Whose mother nursed me! Not confidence in

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Janette? Why the child shall stay with her till it reaches its ninth year—then it shall be put in a convent."

"And when she leaves that?" asked the Countess, bestowing the proper sex upon her child.

"She will get married, I suppose," said the Count with the air of a man who desires to finish the conversation.

Indeed little more was said. The Countess had the idea, as he called it, so firmly fixed in her mind, that she now asked if he would object to her going there alone. To this the Count assented willingly—too willingly, perhaps, thought the young wife; but she was getting used to that.

And so she went to the old chateau, where she herself was born, and which singularly enough had belonged to the Counts de Frissac until the Revolution of —93, when it passed into the hands of her family; a wealthy and respectable one, though untitled.

Janette was soon induced to leave her cottage, and bring her little nursling to the chateau. The more readily, indeed, as her husband had gone to Paris to seek his fortunes, and as her own little child had died. If kindness can relieve sorrow, Janette must not have pined a single day, for the Countess overjoyed to see her own child—the little being in whom now all her hopes were centred—so well both in health and spirits, treated the bereaved Janette with

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a solicitude almost affectionate. Hortense grew in years and beauty, never leaving her mother's side, and seeing her father but for two or three months in each year. The old chateau was gay enough in the shooting season; its lofty halls resounded to the step of many a puissant lord and lovely dame; the woods rang again with their hilarity, and frightened the poor pheasants as they clustered together up in the great trees. During these three months little Hortense was rarely seen either by the guests, or by her father. There was a cozy nook at one corner of the house—although from the melancholy grandeur of the reception halls, you would scarcely have thought so. To this little nest flew the young bird, and often enough, in spite of her duties to the noble guests, the parent Countess, too.

There had been a sort of tacit understanding between the husband and wife, that Hortense should be left entirely to the care of her mother. In fact, with his horses and dogs, his shooting and hunting, the Count found little enough time to think of his daughter. When he did so, he imagined that her mother had put her within the friendly walls of a convent, to obtain that scanty education which is there bestowed on the French *demoiselle de famille*, and which consists in speaking her own language with correctness, having a due appreciation of the incompleteness of those of all other nations, a good knowledge of arithmetic and French history (no other), the whole surmounted



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by a fair idea of music. Little did he think that his daughter had had from earliest childhood not only the tutorship of her mother, but the aid of the most celebrated professors who could be found, and that thus she was accomplished in the highest degree. A perfect musician and a linguist. This had been obtained without her leaving home, even for a day. Her mother, though a Catholic, and of course believing a convent to be nought but the abiding place of virtue, truth and wisdom, could not make up her mind to be separated from her daughter, and thus brought her up an open-hearted guileless creature, which she might not have been had she have entered the walls of a convent, even as a school. For admire, as we all do, the self-sacrificing devotion of the sisters of charity, the humbleness, the kindness, the patient suffering with which those holy women go through life, it is nevertheless a fact that this religion teaches deceit. Is not your child whom you have placed in a convent, bound to tell you that she is comfortable and well treated, when one of the sisters is placed there to listen to your conversation—to report every word you say? Would she dare tell you that because a lesson was unlearnt, or an *Ave* improperly repeated, she was locked up without food for the whole day by way of punishment? No, not one word dare she confide to her parents—not one appeal to be taken away, because the stern judge is sitting there; and the little boldness she may feel in the

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presence of her parents, is quelled by the thought that their visit will soon be over, and that she will be again left alone with her guardians. A strange instance of the rigour with which all private communication between parent and child is prevented, came under my notice not long since. A Catholic mother paid a visit to her child at a convent; she was accompanied by a friend—a Protestant lady. The child entered the room, accompanied of course by a nun. This intrusion (as the Protestant lady considered it) joined to a certain hesitancy shown by the child in its replies to almost every question, caused the visitor to think the girl was not happy. She therefore spoke in English, which language the child understood, saying, "Are you happy here Marie? What is the matter?" Before Marie could answer the nun rose and rang a bell violently. A servant appeared. "Send here directly a sister who speaks English," said she as she reseated herself. The visit terminated, the mother, with all the obstinacy of the faithful, as they call themselves, failing to see in this any thing but a just rebuke for a breach of politeness on the part of her friend, in using a language with which the nun was not conversant. But to return to Hortense. Although but seventeen at the time this story opens, she seemed to have already attained her full proportions, she was tall and *svelte*, with small delicate hands and feet. Her beauty was all the more remarkable because so rare in France.

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Her light golden hair fell, when unconfined, in luxuriant ringlets to her waist, and rippled in soft waves on her snowy forehead. Her large deep blue eyes were soft and dreamy in their expression, but the absence of all ruddiness from the face caused her to be somewhat too much, perhaps, of the statuesque style of beauty. In spite of her country life, her horseback exercise, her wholesome simple diet, Hortense could never charm the roses into her soft cheeks; yet 'twas not the paleness of an invalid. She was the picture of life and health, but always that creamy transparent complexion, like that exquisite marble from Carrara, through whose lovely whiteness the delicate blue veins may still be seen. An old story in the de Frissac family, which dated back to the time when gallant knights took leave of their ladyes faire, and set out gaily on their holy mission to Palestine, ran as follows: "The noble lady of de Frissac sat in her turreted tower, making the ugly embroidery of the day, and sometimes tuning a lute, waiting patiently for her lord's return from the Holy Land. He did return—not bearing his shield but borne on it. Some kinsman had afforded her the opportunity of seeing him once more, though cold in death. She rose to receive her lord—she uttered no sigh when she understood the sad truth; she made no movement; her kinsman spoke but she answered not—her maidens touched her but she stirred not. Life had flown from the lovely tenement, but left none of death's

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horrors. The heart had stopped, the soul had sped, nought there was but the woman's form, and that turned to marble." In after ages an ancestor had commemorated the fact or fable, and one of those yellow time-stained statues in that lordly hall represented this sorrow-stricken wife, as with long braided hair and jewel broidered robe, she stood waiting to receive a living lord, and found instead a blood-stained lifeless corse. Some sage, or seer, then and there predicted that no daughter of the de Frissac line should ever again wear a peachy bloom on her maiden cheeks; all should inherit the marble paleness of this great ancestral dame. Janette, the nurse, would have sworn that this was the cause of her darling foster child's paleness; the Count, less prone to superstition, did not perhaps attribute his daughter's white brow to the old prediction, but it did not displease him to hear a reference to the de Frissacs, the Crusaders. He was prouder of the families of the past than of that of the present; not so the Countess; no demoiselle de Frissac could ever have equalled Hortense in her eyes, and no crusader was ever more deeply loved than Henri de Frissac. Love must be great indeed, when it can support coldness and neglect from its object.

But to return. At the time our story begins Hortense de Frissac was of an age to be asked in marriage; her suitor was a gentleman of rank and fortune, a person whom the Countess knew Monsieur

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de Frissac approved of in every way; nay, even the most scrupulous of her acquaintances would consider the Marquis a magnificent *parti*. Why, then, did the Countess shudder? Why did she leave the corner of the window in which she had been reclining, and pace the room with hurried steps? In two weeks she must give her answer. How short the time seemed. Must she consult the Count? Nothing would come of that. He would tell her, in his apathetic manner, to do as she pleased in the matter; as for Hortense, her affections the mother knew were disengaged, and she would obey the behests of her parents. And this offer of the Marquis's which seemed under every aspect so advantageous, why did it appear to her so frightful? Because she thought she saw in it some *rapproachment* to her own unhappy marriage. She saw her child in the plentitude of her young heart's affections, giving forth to this man her store of undying, never ceasing devotion. And what would be the return? What was *her* return? Coldness, neglect—the young heart blighted; too proud to seek, in confidence, a balm for its sorrow, too loving to desire consolation which would accuse *him*. And must this be her child's lot? Heaven forfend! No, she would go to her husband—make an effort to rouse him into taking for once an interest in what so nearly concerned him. But then she might be wronging the Marquis. Might he not make a kind and affectionate husband? Might he not truly love

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her? He said so. If he did not, why did he wish to marry her? The Countess bit her lip, as she remembered that years ago *she* had asked the same question of *him*. But here, at least, there could be no mercenary motives; the Marquis, besides his noble name, possessed one of the finest fortunes in France: as great, if not greater, than Hortense's dowry. He *must* love her.

He did love her, as much as a heart like that can love. He had seen her, been charmed by her beauty, reflected that he was growing tired of the ephemeral pleasures of a Parisian life, that it behoved him to bestow upon posterity the noble name he had inherited—that, in fact, it was his duty to marry. Discovering a few gray hairs one morning, and remembering that he was past forty (the *mauvaises langues* said past fifty), settled the question. The only thing that remained to be done, after this important resolution had been taken, was to look about for the lady upon whom to fix his choice. The Count de Frissac's invitation to pass a few weeks at his chateau, during the shooting season, found the Marquis still undecided as to which of the Parisian *belles* he should honour by the offer of his hand, when Hortense's sudden appearance one day, mounted on a white pony, ready for her morning ride, caused him to feel that she was a person worthy of bearing his name. The offer was made the next day, and three days after that, took place the interview above recorded.

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The guests began to assemble for dinner; the tell-tale mirrors warned the Countess of their approach through the halls, and therefore when they joined their hostess all marks of agitation had disappeared from her beautiful features.

"Dear Countess," said a fat showily dressed lady who entered, leaning on the arm of a gentleman much younger than herself, "why did you not go for a ride this afternoon? It was such lovely weather—no sun. A covered sky, the most delightful of all for riding or driving."

"I had a severe headache," said the Countess.

"You are not now suffering?" was eagerly asked by the gentleman, who was named Monsieur Georges Morlot.

"No! a little repose and a *flacon* of good salts have chased away the disagreeable visitor. Are you often troubled in that way, Madame de Neris?"

"Don't speak of it, my dear. I am a martyr to the headache; the doctors at one time attributed it to the head being heated by the hair."

This certainly could not be the case now; poor Madame de Neris's head was entirely abandoned by the capillary substance, and she now wore something thereon which flavoured much more of art than of nature.

"What sport to-day, Monsieur Morlot?" asked the Countess.

"'Tis always the same thing, Madame—Monsieur

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de Frissac is so good a marksman, that others have but little chance beside him. His superiority is so great that to-day he desired us each to take turns in having the first shot; at least to shoot before him. By this means we managed to keep up our reputations, which we were well nigh losing before."

"Monsieur de Frissac adores the sports of the field. It has always been a passion with him. But it must be poor sport when one person always wins."

"It is indeed; so we have resolved to vote him out of the party."

"Don't, my dear fellow, don't!" said the Count, who now entered the room. "I should die of *ennui* if I had not that excitement. I only pass three months of the year at Chateau Frissac as it is, and I should not be able to stand that, were it not for your agreeable companionship and my gun."

"Don't forget the gun, Count," said Madame de Neris.

"No, Madame, never; I think life would be unbearable without one's dogs, one's horses, and one's gun."

"And yet there are persons who manage to be happy without any of those," said the Countess.

"Yes, people who are fond of whimpering women and crying babies, I suppose."

The Countess turned to speak to Madame de Neris, without seeming to notice the rude speech; she

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felt it though, deeply: it was a rudeness meant for herself. She could not habituate herself to these repeated affronts. She spoke laughingly on another subject to Madame de Neris, but an acute observer might have seen that her gaiety was forced. One person there did observe it, but that was not Madame de Neris.

"Oh, Count, how can you speak so of little babies," said that voluble lady. "I am sure I adore them. We were all babies once you know—little darlings!"

"As I said before, Madame, I don't know which I dislike the most—squalling babies or whimpering women."

Madame de Frissac felt a burning blush stealing over her face; she soon overcame her desire to answer, however, and hoped that no one had observed her hot blush of indignation; she lifted her eyes and found those of Monsieur Georges Morlot fixed upon her face.

"Whimpering women, Count," said the obtuse Madame de Neris, returning to the charge, "what experience can you possibly have in—"

"There is Mademoiselle," said Monsieur Morlot, looking out of the window.

The Countess thanked him in her heart for his interruption of Madame de Neris's speech, which would certainly have given rise to a retort more cutting still from the Count. Hortense had passed

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the window with her governess, but did not enter the drawing-room.

"Where was Mortimer all day, Morlot?" asked the Count.

Now this Monsieur Morlot was the Count's most intimate friend; might vulgarly have been called his right hand man. De Frissac went nowhere unless accompanied by him. In the fashionable season they were at Baden together; in Paris during the winter. Morlot was perhaps the only person alive whom de Frissac honoured with his confidence: certainly he bestowed none of it on his wife and daughter. Monsieur Morlot was known to belong to a *roturière* family; but a large fortune, a good education, a long intercourse with gentlemen of birth and breeding, had certainly eradicated all traces of his earlier associations. He was about thirty-five years of age, tall, and of prepossessing exterior: joined to which he had a voice of very agreeable *timbre;* neither too high nor too low—not of honied sweetness nor too trumpet toned. Altogether he was an agreeable man—at all events the Count found him so, for, as I said before, he went nowhere and did nothing without Morlot. Though de Frissac treated him merely as a friend, a good fellow, and that sort of thing, utterly disclaiming any closer intimacy, it was whispered about among the tenants that when it went hard to pay the rent, or when repairs were needed, if Monsieur Morlot could be induced to say he would see to it the thing was done.

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This perhaps was merely rumour; but that it was afloat, even in Paris, was proved by Mademoiselle Aspasie Paslegères having written all sorts of *billets doux* to Monsieur Georges Morlot, it afterwards appearing that she had heard the best way to get into the good graces of the Count de Frissac, was to win over to her side Monsieur Georges Morlot. Whether she touched the heart or the purse of either, is not for us to inquire. Having thus introduced Monsieur Morlot, I must give his reply to the Count's question.

"Monsieur Sydney Mortimer was making sketches I believe, all the afternoon."

"Ah, of course, he is most talented in that way. Have you seen the drawing he has made of my daughter's dog, Madame de Neris?"

"What, Ponto? No."

"It is a most extrordinary likeness," said the Countess.

"Picture of a dog? Why I thought all dogs were alike."

"You might as well have thought all human beings were alike, Madame," said the Count. "Ponto is the most intelligent animal. Morlot, did you ever notice his eye?"

The Count, in his enthusiasm about dogs, drew nearer Morlot, leaving the ladies to welcome the guests. First there came the Baron and Baroness de Chambellas and their daughter, aged eighteen. The

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Baroness was a stout lady, with a very dark complexion, heavy black hair, and rather too much of a moustache. All devices had been employed by the Baroness to eradicate the offender; the hairs had been wrenched out by force—innumerable "destroyers" employed, but all to no purpose—the moustache remained, and what was still more terrible, Mademoiselle de Chambellas, the daughter, was already beginning to have a little, a very little, but still very *black* down, on her upper lip. "Better so than for her to be like that milk-and-water Hortense de Frissac, Helene has at least got something striking about her." This remark was often made by the Baroness to Helene's father. But he, strange man, seemed always to disagree with his wife on the subject of Hortense's beauty; he thought her most charming, and so did all the gentlemen. "Well, where you see it, I don't know," replied the Baroness. "Men are so queer."

Then there was Madame Ligault—a young and pretty widow, and cousin-german to Madame de Frissac. The gentlemen were unanimous in regard to her good looks, and each had some term expressive of admiration to apply to the widow. Of course this took place among them when alone, and like heaven knows how many other things the ladies never heard about it. Madame Ligault professed still to be in mourning for her defunct consort; but her mourning was confined to the most fashionably

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cut gray silks, the most delicate *mauves*, and a quantity of exquisite lace, which was "either white or black, both mourning," as she observed to Madame de Neris. Mourning or colours, Madame Ligault looked very handsome at all times, and particularly so to-day. She had sparkling black eyes, a nose rather *retroussé*, nice hair, always beautifully dressed, and a delicate rosy colour in her checks, which greatly enhanced her good looks. She, with her married woman's privilege, was very sprightly, very talkative, and, like many chatty people, had got the reputation of being wonderfully witty; the exception in her case was, that she certainly deserved at least some part of her reputation. She was always surrounded by a bevy of young men—the best dressed, most fashionable, best looking noodles in Paris. They followed wherever she went, and fluttering around her reminded one constantly of the old story—the Candle and the Moths. She had been for a horseback ride to-day, accompanied by the moths in question, and never did the candle shine so brightly as when the jaunty habit donned, the horse mounted, she galloped off on her spirited steed, managing him with a truly skilful hand, followed by that crowd of well-dressed, good-looking, wretchedly inexperienced riders, whose want of knowledge of the art of equitation, made her really bold leaps something too dreadful to be contemplated. As the tender-hearted woman hides her head in her hands, and shudders when she sees the

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slack-rope dancer at the circus about to fling himself downwards into space, only supported by one toe; so did the moths shudder and turn away at her leaps, to shout the louder once they were accomplished. While Madame Ligault was telling the Countess that she had torn her habit, and that she would be obliged to write to *Alfred* to make her another, with all haste, those of her bevy who were not listening to this resolve, and considering it a new proof of her prowess as an amazon, were discussing among themselves her beauties and her entire superiority over every other woman in the known world. It was rather an extraordinary thing that there seemed no silent one among all these; there was no jealousy because there was no favourite; there was no pining love-stricken swain, because every one knew that Madame Ligault required in the favoured one, who should cause her to throw off her lightly worn mourning, more qualities of head and heart than any of them possessed. Besides, they believed she would require a fortune. Was she not inordinately fond of dress and pleasure? This nor the other qualifications, did any of them possess, but still they circled around the attractive young widow.

"Well, are we all assembled?" asked the Count, "the Marquis went up to Paris this afternoon by the train: so we shall not see him at dinner. Mortimer, you must show Madame de Neris your sketch of Ponto. Nonsense man," continued the host, "there's

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not a ditch ten feet wide within ten miles"—this was in answer to some remark made by one of Madame Ligault's admirers. The doors were at this moment thrown open, and a servant exclaimed in a sonorous voice, Dinner is served, Madame la Comtesse!

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## CHAPTER II.

### SYDNEY MORTIMER.

In spite of the absence of the Marquis de Claremont Brezè, (the guest of highest rank at the chateau,) the dinner passed off pleasantly enough. Monsieur Georges Morlot sat next the Countess; Madame Ligault was surrounded by her young admirers, Madame de Neris beside Monsieur de Frissac, and the Baroness de Chambellas next her husband; very unfashionably, it is true, but the Baron had lost an arm in Algeria, and he would have made a sorry dinner, if that kind-hearted moustachioed lady had not set next him, and aided him in the dissection of the divers tit-bits which fell to his share. Hortense, who had slipped into the drawing-room unobserved, walked as far as the dining-hall with her arm round Helene's waist; they said they would sit next each other at dinner, but somehow they got separated, and poor Helene was forced to sit between two of Madame Ligault's adorers. With her own natural timidity, and the knowledge that these gentlemen



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were disappointed at having to play the amiable to her instead of to the young widow, Helene was very uncomfortable. Speaking of it afterwards, Hortense said, "it *was* tiresome their not being able to sit together; she would speak to the *maitre d'hotel* about placing them together for the future. There is nothing more uncomfortable than sitting next to gentlemen who you are convinced desire to be near some one else." But did the person who sat at Hortense's right hand wish to be near any one else? I think not. Neither had spoken ten words to the other during dinner, but I am sure both were well pleased at the arrangement.

Mr. Sydney Mortimer, the gentleman I refer to, was an Englishman—the only "foreigner" at the table. He was just five-and-twenty: he was about middle height, and possessed a mass of rich brown hair, so thick that the parting was hardly visible, the hair rising up on each side of it like two ranges of continuous little mountains. His eyes were brown—very large and brilliant; but with none of that shining which is often called brightness, and which reminds one of the glittering eyes of a serpent. No! Sydney Mortimer's eyes were eminently honest ones, and a more honest smile than his you might not see "in a day's walk,"—which walk, with some persons, is so limited as to afford but little field for observation. He was, and had been for some years, an orphan; he had no kith or kin, save one brother—

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his senior, who inherited the estate, had married, and whose wife had taken a dislike to Sydney. A maternal uncle dying considerately at an opportune moment, left Sydney a comfortable income. Not much, but enough on the continent to allow a gentleman to dress and live as a gentleman should. He had made de Frissac's acquaintance in rather a singular way; it was during Sydney's first visit to France. One Sunday, after having taken a long walk, he came unexpectedly upon the race track in the Bois de Boulogne. Races were going on; the stands were filled with beautifully dressed ladies and with gentlemen from the different clubs. Outside the ropes was a goodly collection of carriages—broughams, *caleçhes*, pony-chaises, four-in-hands, stage-coaches — everything, in fact, that England can invent and France can buy. Sydney's love for horse-racing was too great to allow him to turn away when once he had tasted the sweetness; he did not turn away though it was Sunday, but walked up quickly and entered the Grand Stand. After inspecting the beauty of the scene for a few moments, he went to see the jockeys weighed. Here he found several persons in a state of great excitement. A gentleman (de Frissac) kept anxiously looking at his watch every five seconds, uttering the while a great many of those French oaths which sound so dreadful, but are in reality so harmless.

"*Sacrebleu!* Parker not come yet, and it's a

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quarter of an hour behind time now." Parker was the jockey who was to ride de Frissac's horse, so his absence was really serious. The friends of the Count, Morlot amongst the number, were not less agitated than himself; they had bet largely on the horse, which was an English thorough bred. By this time, the other horses, six in number, were all saddled; the jockeys mounted, were galloping them up and down before the stands preparatory to the struggle, as before a difficult overture, musicians tune their instruments to that extent that you are left in a hopeless state of headache and utterly incapable of appreciating the music when it at last commences. The bell rang, and still no jockey for de Frissac's horse. Morlot came to state he had heard it reported vaguely that Parker had left Paris that morning by the seven o'clock train for England—it was said not empty handed. "What treachery! the cursed Englishman," muttered de Frissac.

Sydney heard the whole conversation; he had a good heart and felt really sorry for the owner of the noble beast; he never reflected a moment, but walked straight up to de Frissac and said:

"I will ride your horse for you if you like, Monsieur."

De Frissac saw from his accent that he was English, and his joy at the offer was too great for words —there was no time to say "thank you," or to ask who or what the new comer might be. Hastily seizing

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the satin jacket destined for the missing jockey, he handed it to Sydney, who quietly though quickly prepared himself, was mounted and about to proceed into the ring just as the steward came back to see if the Count de Frissac's horse was or was not going to start. He did start and won the race; but not without a struggle. De Frissac, seated near the judges stand, felt a thrill of pleasure as he saw the skilful jockeying of this strange Englishman, who had offered his services so unexpectedly; "but he would reward him well, that he would, he inwardly averred." The race was won; the Count's horse was proclaimed victor. De Frissac turned to seek the person who had ridden him, when he was detained by a lady who wished to know why racing horses were never white, and he only got down from the stand in time to see the apathetic young Englishman walking quietly away. The Count ran after him. He had a number of bank notes in his hand; but when Mortimer turned round the Count stuffed the notes into his pocket, blushing like a school-girl; he felt *that* was not the sort of reward to be offered. Thanking Sydney warmly for his kindness, he handed him his card, and begged the honour of Mortimer's in return. Sydney glanced at it; he had inherited a good healthy English horror of dirty, frog-eating, dickey-bosomed, poverty-stricken, fictitious French Counts; besides he was angry at himself for having ridden the race on a Sunday. Not all the excitement of having won, nor the pleasure of having done a

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kindness, could make him forget that he had done a thing which he had been taught to regard as wrong, and which he felt was so. Thus, when de Frissac said he hoped to have the honour of Mortimer's acquaintance, and asked him to dine that day at the Jockey Club with him, Sydney wrapped a mantle of dignity about him, and said in a freezing tone, that he was sorry he could not accept the invitation, and, as to further acquaintance, he was so soon to return to England, that Monsieur le Comte (he emphasized the title very cuttingly, as he thought) must really allow him to wish him good day. So saying, he turned away with a stiff bow; the Count politely lifting his hat in return.

Now Sydney had no settled plan about going away; in fact, he had rather thought of staying some months in Paris. He painted well, and had half made up his mind to stop and make some copies at the Louvre. He had told the Count he was going because he did not wish any further acquaintance with the man whose horse he had ridden on a Sunday. He did not stop for the last race; but went home moodily enough to his room, "*au sixième*," as he called it in his letters to his brother. Upon the table he found a letter, in a strange hand and with a black seal. Tremblingly he opened it, and read therein the announcement of the death of an aged and long suffering uncle. He had seen little enough of this relative while he was alive; had naturally

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never felt any great affection for him; but now that he was dead, Sydney heaved a few sighs, some of which were for the uncle, and some, it must be confessed, for his misdemeanour of the afternoon. The letter was from Mr. Getallican, a London solicitor, and apprised him of a legacy of five hundred pounds a year, which had been left him; also that his presence was necessary in London.

"So I did not tell that Frenchman any story, when I said I was going," thought Sydney. But even the conviction that he had not told an untruth, failed to soothe that restless spirit; he blamed himself, was disgusted with himself, as he expressed it, that he had not knocked the fellow down: though what possible provocation he could have had for so doing, is not apparent. Altogether, in spite of the additional five hundred a year (Sydney was not mercenary), he was far from happy. "I should not be surprised if Sarah found out I had ridden a strange Frenchman's horse, in the midst of jockeys by profession—and on a Sunday too." Thus soliloquized Sydney. But then came reflection, and told him that this was almost impossible, inasmuch as he was known to but few persons in Paris, and that he had refused to give his card to the owner of the horse.

Sydney loved his brother, as younger brothers rarely do their seniors. He valued his good opinion, and thus a feeling of uneasy self-reproach accompanied Sydney home.

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Married, during five years no children had been vouchsafed to bless his brother's union; soured, perhaps, by this, and stung by the increasing (if possible) affection between the brothers, Sarah, the wife, who had always disliked Sydney, vowed she would render his living at Mortimer Hall an impossibility. Her grudge against her husband's brother was of long date. Mrs. Mortimer's family were neighbours of the Mortimers, and, as children, her brother and herself had played with Henry and Sydney. Mrs. Sarah's brother was a violent, passionate, and cruel boy, addicted to teazing any creatures that could not resist him. His sister, I am sorry to say, rather inclined to his sports. On one occasion her brother and herself were busily engaged drowning a poor cur they had captured in the lane, by making it delusive offers of a meal. The cake shown to the poor dog they themselves ate; at once they had him fast, and then, as a finale to their enjoyments, they concluded they would drown the poor beast in the stream near by. While accomplishing this purpose, and as an evidence that the poor cur's star was not yet set, Sydney came along. To rescue the dog was his first effort—the next was to administer a tremendous thrashing to Sarah's brother. I am sorry to add that, in his indignation, he threw Sarah herself into the water, where it was shallow and muddy. Sarah never forgave this. In after years Henry became attached to Sarah, wooed, and won her—but the child grown into a woman,

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still disliked Sydney, and never did Sarah neglect an opportunity of causing him to feel that where *she* lived, there his home might not be. Her brother, who had received more than one thrashing from Sydney, also disliked him, and by his injudicious advice kept alive his sister's rancour.

Now that Sydney had a liberal income of his own, his brother Henry hoped that he would live at home. Sydney tried it for three months—was gentle, was obliging to his sister-in-law, but all to no avail; his very amiability made her lose patience with him. It was evident that he would never do any thing to offend his brother, so the only way in which she could estrange them, would be by pretending Sydney had been disagreeable to *her*.

"Yes, your smiling faced brother," she said to her husband, "is always playing the amiable to *you*—the sychophant."

"Why should you call him that, Sarah—why should he be sycophantic with me? he has nothing to gain by it."

"Oh, hasn't he? Can't you do what you like with the property—leave it to whom you please? It is not entailed, you know, and we have no children."

"We may have still; besides Sydney has a good income of his own; even if he had not, he is altogether too high minded to have any such ideas as you attribute to him. I cannot, and I will not, Sarah—



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excuse my using such strong terms—but I will not hear Sydney so maligned."

"Oh, of course you think I malign him. I'll tell you what it is, Henry, it is not a husband's duty to allow his brother to speak against his wife."

"Why, Sarah, you are raving; he always speaks of you in the highest terms; he only regrets that you should so dislike him."

"I do not dislike him; but I tell you there is something wrong when two brothers never have a word together, like you and Sydney—walking arm-in-arm, calling each other *Syddy* and *Hal*. It's not manly. I am sure there's deception somewhere, and I know it's not on your side, Henry. Why, *my* brothers used to fight all day long, and yet there was no settled bad feeling between them. Just see how different it is with you."

"I am very sorry, Sarah, that we can't be like your brothers. We lost our parents early, and I suppose that's the reason we are so drawn together."

Mrs. Henry Mortimer could evidently get very little satisfaction from her husband on this tack; so, like a skilful sailor, she at once changed her sailing. "She would make the house too hot to hold him," she inwardly resolved; but Sydney, for his brother's sake, had made up his mind to stand an extraordinary amount of house heating. Sarah complained of his smoking in the house. All ladies find this the most effectual and ready attack. So Sydney went

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out of the house with his havannahs—and Henry followed him. But this did not suit Mrs. Sarah. "Henry was delicate and must not stand under the verandah when that Scotch mist was falling; 'twas all very well for Sydney, who was strong and did not fear cold, catarrhs, or rheumatism; but it was quite a different thing with Henry, who had been obliged to keep his bed with cold for six weeks the preceding winter."

"Well, what do you want, Sarah? Am I to relinquish smoking entirely? You never before objected to my smoking in the library."

"Nor do I now, Henry; far from it; I am not so unreasonable as that."

Henry thought she was unreasonable, and said so.

"Oh, yes, of course I am; Mr. Sydney Mortimer has no doubt expressed himself to you in those terms."

He paid no attention to this remark, but said tartly, "what are you trying to drive at about the smoking?"

She did not like the expression "drive at," but to gain her object she swallowed her resentment, and explained to Henry that she had no objection to *his* smoking in the library.

"You know you never smoke more than one cigar, but your brother never contents himself with less than two." It would make that room smell so

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of tobacco smoke, that *she*, for one, would never be able to enter it.

In this manner did Mrs. Sarah continue her discourse, till it became evident to her husband that what she was "driving at," was that he might smoke in the library, but that his brother should have no such privilege. And now it was the mild husband's turn to rebel. He would not stand such tyranny; he loved his brother—"Yes, more than you do your wife—that's evident." If Sydney might not smoke in the library no more would he. On this point he was inexorable; he would not allow his brother to be thus shamefully treated. And so he continued to exile himself with his brother, every day when the smoking hour came. All this tended very little to soften Mrs. Mortimer's heart towards the unoffending brother-in-law. Sydney had several times asked his brother if he did not think it were better for him to go. "She does not like me, Hal," he would say, "and she makes you suffer for it." Poor Sydney! he said nothing of how he suffered himself. Henry would not hear of Sydney's departure. But a few days after this, the storm burst, and Sydney determined he would no longer embitter his brother's happiness. A remark made by Sarah one evening, so wounded his feelings that he rose, shook hands cordially with Henry, and bowing respectfully to his sister-in-law, retired to his own room, from which he emerged at six o'clock the next morning.

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At 6.35, in railway parlance, Sydney's portmanteau and himself were on the road to London. And this is what happened to make Mrs. Sarah so irate, that she even forgot the little awe of her husband in which she stood, and became vituperative to Mr. Sydney Mortimer. There was a certain Mrs. Davis, who lived in the neighbourhood, the widow of an infantry officer, who, on a very small pension, managed to be very comfortable, as half her time was spent at Mortimer Hall, thereby saving her own lights, coals, and marketing. Now Mrs. Mortimer had driven over to Mrs. Davis in the afternoon, while the brothers were out riding. She had gone there to receive the condolences of Mrs. Davis; for Mrs. Sarah had lately conceived a hope that Mortimer Hall was at last to be inherited in the direct line, and Mrs. Sarah was happy. But this hope proved delusive, and therefore the lady went to Mrs. Davis for consolation. Mrs. Davis kissed her rich friend, and even shed a few tears over the disappointment.

"I, who love children so much," sobbed Mrs. Mortimer. "Why, before I was married, nothing delighted me more than playing with my aunt Jemima's babies; and to think that this blessing should be denied to me." Here the poor lady applied her cambric handkerchief to her eyes.

"Yes, my dear," said Mrs. Davis, bringing forth a handkerchief which was not cambric, and insinuating it under her spectacles. "Yes, dear, it is a

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blessing;—you see by my lot the dreariness of an old age unconsoled by the affection of childhood."

Mrs. Sarah wished to be consoled, but she was not going to hear herself, the lady of Mortimer Hall, likened to the widow of a poor officer, living on a miserable pension. An officer, too, who had not even died on the field, but had taken a nasty, unsoldier-like fever, which carried him off—old in years but young in grade; a Captain. It was not to be borne.

"Yes," she said haughtily, "it is, I dare say, very uncomfortable for you, but you see our stations are so different. When one is owner of an estate like Mortimer Hall, it is almost a duty to one's country to have heirs to it."

Little old Mrs. Davis hardly knew what to reply to this. For a moment there was perhaps a little of that feeling of foolish pride which tempted her to say that one gentleman was as good as another, even if one did own Mortimer Hall and the other did not; but Mrs. Davis had no notion of risking the good dinners in store for her at Mrs. Mortimer's, the pots of jam, and other niceties which found their way from the great house to the small one, particularly at Christmas time. So she racked her brain for an answer which would be agreeable to her visitor.

"Dear Mrs. Mortimer, it *is* dreadful; but it is not your fault. Do not distress yourself about its being your duty. Even kings and queens have died without issue, and the royal heritage has gone to dis-

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tant cousins, and sometimes to persons not at all related; usurpers, you know, dear." Mrs. Davis stopped; it suddenly occurred to her that Mrs. Mortimer might not like the idea of usurpation. "And then you know there's Mr. Sydney—that dear brother of Mr. Mortimer's; everybody adores him; the people all look to him as the future Squire. They like him so much, and are so pleased at his living at the hall. 'The Lord bless him,' said Farmer Gnarles to me the other day, 'it do one good to see his handsome face, Missus Davis.'"

Poor little old captain's widow! You who had ransacked your imagination to find something agreeable to say to the lady who dined you and jampotted you; you little thought that of all subjects in the world, you had touched on the one the most distasteful to Mrs. Henry Mortimer. But the lady of Mortimer Hall dissimulated that she might glean from Mrs. Davis the extent of this talking among the tenants—of this impudent hoping that Sydney would be heir to the estate. It appeared from Mrs. Davis's report, that they speculated in this strain: that Squire Mortimer was many years older than Sydney—that six years had passed since his nuptials, and that there were no children; this, joined to the desire that he should be so, made them fix upon the younger brother as heir to the estate.

"Heaven be praised! there's no chance of Mr. Mortimer dying for many years to come; if he did,

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Mr. Sydney is well provided for by the death of his uncle, and, besides, who knows? There may still be an heir," said Mrs. Sarah.

"Yes, my dear, so there may, and I sincerely trust there will; but I only say, do not distress yourself, for Sydney, after all, is a Mortimer, and is much beloved by everybody." Whereupon Mrs. Davis began a list of the young man's virtues and talents, all of which was gall and wormwood to Mrs. Sarah. But Mrs. Davis did not know this; the lady of Mortimer Hall had never confided to her the dislike she bore to the younger brother. If the Captain's widow had suspected this, how black a fiend, how hateful, how designing a younger brother, might she not have painted Sydney! But thinking no theme could be so sweet as the grandeur and goodness of the Mortimers, Mrs. Davis ran on, till the lady said she must go.

As Madame Sarah drove home in her little basket carriage, she settled her plan of attack, and doubted not of her success in ousting the intruder. She still clung to the hope that her husband would not die, "as some kings had, without issue," but in the event of this happening she wished to be the lady of Mortimer Hall, alone and undisputed; if she could not manage the estate herself, she could send for one or two of those amiable brothers of hers, who were "always fighting," and who did not live on in that hopeless state of friendship like Sydney and his brother.

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During dinner she sat morose and silent; she could not make her mind up to open the fire. But some allusion made by Sydney to the kindness and worthiness of Farmer Gnarles's wife, was as the match to the powder magazine. Farmer Gnarles was one of the principal offenders, so she began—

"Oh yes, I dare say, Dame Gnarles is fond of you. Although your brother seems to be quite unaware of your constant efforts to undermine him with the tenants, other people see it, Mr. Sydney Mortimer; some of our most influential neighbours have spoken to me about it; they consider it quite disgraceful that you should encourage the people to look upon you as the future heir to the estate."

It was at this point that Sydney rose, and taking Henry's hand between both his own, wished his brother an affectionate farewell. Nor could Henry find it in his heart now to detain him. The good-natured Sydney tried to excuse Sarah; said she had been worked upon by mischief-makers, but Henry was less charitable. Sydney did not stay long in London; he merely wrote a few lines to Mr. Getallican, giving him an address in Paris, and was off at once to the scene of his jockeying exploits. Once arrived in the gay capital he determined that he would seek amusement, as a reward for his late martyrdom.

Entering the Comedie Française one evening, Sydney looked around for a seat; he saw that they

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were almost all occupied. In fact, by the time the three knocks, announcing that the play was about to begin, had been struck, every seat was full; that is, Sydney thought so at the first glance, but, as is the case with us in many circumstances, he had looked at the distant places, and not cast his eye on those nearest him. One seat was empty, and that the very one against which he was leaning; so waiting till the act had been going on for about ten minutes, and seeing that the former occupant (if there had been one) did not return, he sat down. At intervals Sydney examined with care and interest the ladies present. He had just come to the conclusion that there was no beauty in France, and that the *coup d'œil* of the Français was not to be compared to that of Drury Lane, when he heard some one say, in a low tone, "I wonder why papa does not come back, mamma?" "He'll come soon, I dare say," was the reply. This, of course, in French, but Sydney understood; he comprehended, also, something more from these few words, and that was, that *he* must be occupying the seat of the absent papa. To steal a look at his neighbours was easy enough, and after he had done so, Sydney declared that there *was* beauty in France after all. He was sitting next the most beautiful creature in the world, at least so Sydney thought. She was a young girl, evidently not more than seventeen, dressed with all the simplicity of the French *demoiselle*, while her mother (for so she called the

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elder lady) was as brilliant with jewels as any other *grande dame* of that fashionable assembly. Sydney, with his artist's eye, immediately likened the young creature beside him to a Madonna; with her fair hair braided simply at the back of her head, her soft pale complexion, and her deep blue eyes, she certainly was not unlike our earthly ideas of a celestial being.

The curtain fell, and Sydney feeling sure that the tardy papa must now make his appearance, left his seat and stood near the door. Two or three gentlemen came up to the ladies, and after making each in turn a courteous French bow, began some, no doubt, courteous conversation, which, at least, had the merit of being brief, and the ladies were again left alone. They kept looking anxiously towards the door, and at one time seemed on the point of leaving the theatre, but the three strokes again sounded, and they reseated themselves. As the gentleman did not come Sydney thought there was no rudeness in resuming the unoccupied stall; as the play proceeded, Mortimer observed that the elder lady turned very pale, and her daughter seemed much alarmed. The mother took the young girl's salts, and, after using them, leaned across her daughter and said to Sydney, in a low tone: "Sir, would you oblige me by opening that door?"

Sydney bowed and quietly opened the door; the heat had been stifling—no wonder the poor lady felt relieved, at the gush of air. She regained her colour

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instantly. And now took place one of those disagreeable scenes which occur at least once in every man's life, and which tend either to make him appear a bully or a coward. The moment the door was opened (Sydney left it slightly ajar) a man sitting in front of the ladies had put on his hat. This totally obstructed the view of the stage from the elder lady; so effectually, indeed, that after several fruitless efforts to see, first on one side of the hat, and then the other, she gave up the attempt and looked listlessly away. Sydney felt very much tempted to knock the man as well as the hat off the seat, but conquering these feelings, he leaned forward and said politely: "Sir, I beg you to take off your hat, it prevents these ladies seeing."

The man turned, and showed himself to be a rough black looking Frenchman; a very large man, and evidently a vulgar one. He turned to Sydney with an angry look, and said, "When the door is shut, I will—not before."

Now Sydney was not blessed with much mildness of temper in such a case as this. He therefore dropped his politeness, and said fiercely, though in a low tone, to the man—"Take off your hat directly, or you will repent it."

The man did not answer, and Sydney saw that the ladies were beginning to feel uncomfortable. In fact, the mother said to him, "Oh! pray shut the door, it really does not signify."

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"Don't be annoyed, Madame—you are in the right about the door; it shall be left open, and this brute *shall* take off his hat."

Sydney feared this speech might have sounded a little like bravado, and he felt sorry; but there was no help for it now. He found that the man still kept on his hat, and was mumbling something about no one having a right to open a door for the convenience of one person, when others were incommoded by it. Sydney deliberated what he should do; he wished neither to appear the coward nor the bully; at last he raised his hand and quietly knocked off the offensive hat. This Sydney thought would be followed by an effort on the man's part to shut the door. Sydney was not going to allow that. The man was quiet enough, however, till the play was over; then, coming up close to Sydney, he said:

"I shall wait for you at the corner of the street. I'll show you that I understand something of the *boxe Anglais*."

Sydney said "very well," and the man went out. The ladies now rose; the elder approached Mortimer, and said, "I thank you very much for your kindness, Monsieur; I fear that for us you have passed a disagreeable evening." Mortimer assured her that it was not so in the least, and he spoke the truth. He then bowed to the ladies, and began putting on his overcoat very slowly, for the papa had not yet come, and

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Sydney was anxious to see them safely ensconsed in their carriage.

"Your father does not come."

"Here he is, mamma," said the daughter. A gentleman was here seen struggling inwards through the outgoing crowd, and at last succeeded in reaching his ladies.

"I was with Morlot," said he.

Mortimer was now going off to meet the man who could *boxe Anglais*, happy in the thought that the ladies were now in safe keeping, when he felt a hand on his shoulder, and saw that somebody was taking off a hat to him. He recognized the gentleman at once; the Count de Frissac, whose horse he had ridden; the husband of the lady; the father of his Madonna. It is very singular that Sydney did not repulse his advances as he had done after the race. He could be as polite as the Frenchman if needs were; so he bowed and smiled, and when he thought of the coming introduction to the ladies, or rather to the young one, he held out his hand, and gave the Count's a hearty English unforeign shake. They joined the ladies, and Sydney received the thanks of all for his kindness to them. This reminded Sydney of the man who was waiting for him at the corner of the street. He therefore wished the ladies good evening, and gave his card to the Count, who promised to call on him the next morning. De Frissac had heard enough to assure him that Sydney was an English

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gentleman, so he invited him forthwith to spend a few weeks at Chateau Frissac. The Countess and her daughter had been staying a week in Paris, but were to return to the country the next day. That Mortimer accepted we have seen at the beginning of this chapter. As to the irate gentleman, who was to have satisfaction by boxing, though Sydney went to the place of rendezvous directly he left the De Frissacs, though he stayed more than an hour on the spot, waiting, the creature never made his appearance; nor did Mortimer ever hear more of him. Perhaps he reflected afterwards that although he knew "something" of the *boxe Anglais*, he might be less proficient at it than the lithe and athletic young Englishman.

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## CHAPTER III.

### THE PIC-NIC.

CHATEAU FRISSAC is a delightful residence, situated upon an eminence, which spot was chosen centuries ago by some warlike ancestor of the present Count, who, from this commanding height, could discern an enemy afar off, and, perchance, those caravans of rich merchants moving from one great commercial city to another, which were, as history teaches us, regarded as their prey by the rapacious noblemen, who sallied forth with armed attendants, and demanded heavy ransoms ere they allowed them to continue their journey.

Be that as it may, the chateau certainly stands upon such an eminence, and now that it is surrounded by English gardens and lawns, green and smooth, with masses of ivy covering up the rents which time has inflicted upon its massive walls, blending into a harmonious ensemble the whole building, with its different architectural styles, it is really a most beautiful and imposing castle, a fit home for the descend-

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ants of a noble line that dates from those days when Peter, the crazy monk, had roused the chivalry of Europe, to the great detriment of Soliman and his followers. The chateau looked proudly down upon beautiful valleys, spreading far and wide, while back of it ran off in the horizon the park, famous in all the department for its immense size and age. Each year the de Frissacs gathered a suitable number of guests to enjoy with them, for a season, the delights of a residence at the chateau. At the time to which I refer, its gaieties were numberless—charades, private theatricals, and a grand fancy-dress ball had been organized by the vivacious Madame Ligault. Costumes had been ordered, carpenters were working away at the old theatre, parts were being studied, and daily rehearsals were taking place. Some new guests had arrived, and it was announced that a grand pic-nic was to take place the next day, which was to be the forerunner of all the *fêtes* which had been in preparation for so long. This idea did not originate with Madame Ligault; it was Mademoiselle Hortense's English Governess who had ventured to suggest that it was capital fun, and so a *pique-nique* was decided upon immediately. Some invitations were sent out by Madame de Frissac to the neighbours. The place of rendezvous was to be the grounds of an old chateau some three miles off, which had been the favourite residence of Gabrielle d'Estrees. The chateau is now in a state almost of decay, but the grounds are all the more



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lovely from their wildness; ivy creeps "its melancholy length along" the old battlemented walls, and shades the casements where Gabrielle, *la belle* Gabrielle, sat and sighed.

During the time that intervened before the occurrence of the pic-nic, it was the all-engrossing topic; when in company with the gentlemen, the ladies depicted to them the delight of their having to uncork bottles, fetch water from a well, which would of course be miles away, and of having to make themselves generally useful for once in their lives; when the ladies were alone, dress was the principal theme of conversation. Madame Ligault had had at least a dozen hats sent from Paris to choose from; there were three-cornered hats, *à la Louis Quinze*, with drooping plumes, pork pie hats with stiff bird's wing feathers, and mushroom hats with falls of lace. There were black hats and brown, white hats and gray hats, "mingle, mingle, mingle, mingle, ye that mingle may." And they did mingle at the pic-nic—for not one of the dozen was sent back; even the mustachioed Baroness de Chambellas took the hat fever, and discarded her bonnet for the *fête à l'Anglaise*, the *pique-nique*. As for the gentlemen, far be it from me to assert that they gave as much thought to the outward man as did the ladies to the outward woman on this eventful occasion, yet it is not slanderous to say that on the morning in question, they all tried to make themselves look as strikingly *degagé* as possible—rather melancholy,

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slightly Byronical, for this alfresco meeting. The parties who succeeded the most, were those who took the least pains to make themselves look well. Hortense de Frissac, in a plain white muslin dress, with her magnificent hair braided simply, was strikingly like her beautiful marble ancestress. Sydney Mortimer found the oldest morning coat he had, thinking it just the thing for a pic-nic. I am bound to say that it was not *very* old, and that Sydney looked very handsome in it, whatever its age. Madame Ligault looked very pretty indeed; she wore a light piqué dress, looped up just enough to show a very small and nicely booted foot, one of the marvellous little hats which had arrived the day before, trimmed with red and black plumes; this with a narrow linen collar with a small black cravat made her look very pretty, as more than one person there thought and said. She was blooming and piquante, and ready for any amount of repartee.

"What a lovely day!" was the exclamation of the guests, as they opened their windows on the morning. All hastened to assemble, as both lunch and dinner were to be taken on the pic-nic grounds. Madame Ligault, who had instituted herself Major Domo, was early at her post, as usual surrounded by her admirers; having seen that provisions enough to feed a regiment had gone on, she joined those assembled on the lawn, who were waiting to be disposed of in the different conveyances. There was a four-in-hand,

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which the Count drove, in which he took the Baron and Baroness de Chambellas and their daughter, Madame de Neris, Hortense, and two of Madame Ligault's admirers. Mortimer rode. Mr. Georges Morlot drove Madame de Frissac in a phaeton, and Madame Ligault drove the Duke de la Rocheconstant in the Countess' pony-chaise. This gentleman was one of the new arrivals. He had only been three days at the chateau, but had already enrolled himself under Madame Ligault's banner—much to the annoyance of her recognized adorers, who could not fail to see in him a man of a very different stamp to themselves. As in truth he was. One of the bravest officers in the French army, he had already got a fine grade, was decorated, and, still better, in all his hair-breadth 'scapes he had never received a wound. He was a Duke, too; his family occupied, and had done so for Heaven knows how many years, a large house, "between Court and Garden" in the Faubourg St. Germain; the whole rather gloomy and antiquated, but very aristocratic. He was thirty years of age at the time of his presentation to our readers; in nine years he had managed to spend every *sou* of his patrimony, as well as to make large inroads into an estate in the South of France, left him by a relative.

Though a spendthrift, he was a gentleman, a noble-hearted, high-toned gentleman. The universal panacea for purse-suffering man and womankind, a rich marriage, had been recommended to him by his

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family and his friends, and it was understood that there were but two things possible now, to keep the grandeur of the La Rocheconstants from ebbing very low. One of those things was a rich marriage, and failing that, an unsurvivable cannon ball, or not to be too difficult, a musket shot or a sabre wound were to end his dissipated career. The Duke had lived through the hardships, the hunger, the cold, and sufferings of the Crimean war; as to the Italian campaign, that was like child's play to the whole French army; they had luxurious living, a fine climate, and the prestige of being the deliverers of an oppressed race. The cannon and the sabre having as yet declined to aid him in obtaining an honourable grave, he began to think seriously of the other method of interment; it presented quite as formidable an aspect as the first. He almost determined that the future Duchess should be as old and ugly as her money bags were heavy. He thought there would be really less villany in making so clearly a *mariage de convenance*, than in leading to the altar, to make false vows, some young and innocent girl who would see no harm in perjuring herself, since it was the wish, the command of her parents. The Duke had long known the de Frissac family, and the Duchess, his lady mother, had often spoken to him of the beauty, grace, youth and *large fortune* of Mademoiselle Hortense, adding, at the same time, that she did not doubt the Count would consent to a union between them. The Duke

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himself did not doubt that he might obtain the Count's consent, but he was not base enough to offer himself where from a sense of duty he knew there would be no refusal. And though since his arrival at the chateau, he had looked with wonder and admiration upon Hortense's beauty, he only sighed to think how effectually the gates of that heaven were shut upon him. The Duke was aware, were he to ask the consent of the Count and the Countess to woo their daughter, that they would command Hortense to receive his vows. He wanted no bidden love; he would sue for it where it was free and untrammelled; in fact he was rather romantic upon the subject, and, above all, feared that in attaching himself to Hortense, his motives would be misconstrued, and that where there was love the world would see nothing but cupidity. So he determined he would devote himself to Madame Ligault, and did so as coolly as though he had known her for years. I must admit that this pleased and flattered her. He is a tall broad-shouldered man, with large dark eyes, beautifully cut features, his head well set upon his shoulders, and the whole man having that graceful *laisser aller* so pleasing in a soldier; one we know to be brave and daring, and yet who can be as humble and gentle as a woman. The Duke's rank sits well upon him; he is in every way that *preux chevalier* that should be one of his race.

As I said before, Madame Ligault was pleased to

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have this handsome, noble officer so assiduous in his attentions. She had heard much of him from the Count, and even before seeing him, was prepossessed in favour of the gallant soldier. *Messieurs les* moths were entirely done for; it really seemed as if the candle which had shone so long and so brightly was about to turn moth itself, and scorch its wings by the light of the brilliant new comer.

To the pic-nic, then, went Madame Ligault and the Duke; upon their tardy arrival, she asserted that the ponies were dead lame and would not go a step—they certainly were a most unconceivable time getting over three miles. The great pleasure of driving is in going fast, but when this is not to be attained, an agreeable companion certainly makes the otherwise heavy time pass pleasantly enough. So at least thought Madame Ligault, and, consequently, she let the reins hang listlessly in her well gloved hands; leaning back, she shaded herself comfortably with her parasol, the whip portion of which she never once thought of applying to the ponies' backs to make them mend their pace. The Duke and herself touched upon a thousand subjects of conversation, mostly common place, but all in that light tone which denotes that a flirtation is close at hand.

"And so you liked Italy," she asked.

"Yes, it is a glorious country. What magnificent scenery—those green waving plains, and those towering snow-capped mountains. Nature in its bright

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youth and hoary age; the warm sunlight and the chilling blast. The rivers are fine—"

"Rather difficult to cross, I believe you found them?"

"They may be traversed in pontoons."

"You proved that; but you were not so successful in entering the Quadrilateral," said she in a taunting tone.

"We were not called upon to do so," replied he.

"And this is what you got for your pains," said the lady after a pause, pointing to the little knot of green ribbon, which, entwined with a red one, he wore in his button hole.

"Yes, and I value it because I received the cross from the king's hands."

"Oh never mind telling me all that again. I have heard Monsieur de Frissac relate your great deeds. In fact, he has quite fatigued me with their enumeration."

"I'm vexed at Frissac for making you tired of hearing my name. I who desire to make it agreeable to you." As he said this, he gazed at her, with an intensity that made her feel very uncomfortable, coquette as she was. She had had few admirers like Armand de la Rocheconstant. A slight blush, a most becoming one, shadowed her face for a moment, and then she said laughingly,

"And so you value this ribbon?"

"I do," he said.

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"You would not willingly part with it?" She drew closer to him, not much perhaps, and then she looked into his face and said, "Will you not give it to me?"

There was something in her manner which touched the Duke; he gazed at her, and seemingly saw something deep down in those beautiful eyes of hers that attracted him; he gazed long and ardently—a something to him till then unknown came over his spirit and troubled his mind. He felt that he was looking too long, and yet he could not take away his glance. They had known each other exactly three days, and now it seemed to the Duke as though ages had passed since he first knew the lovely, lively woman at his side. He gazed at her admiringly as she jested wittily with her moths: but had prided himself upon the fact that she could never toy with him—had deemed himself invulnerable to her fascination; and now he was gazing at her with as much ardor as though the pent-up passion of years gleamed from out his great black eyes. How happy would his vanity have been could he have known that as Pygmalion's worship gave life to Galathée, so had that long look of his, animated a heart that ere this had never loved.

The lame ponies (afterwards discovered to be perfectly sound in wind and limb), fearing perhaps that their own private reputation would be jeopardized by that lazy walk of three miles, now began to trot briskly of their own accord, and soon reached the



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place of rendezvous; here, of course, there was great bustle, everybody declaring that they could do nothing without Madame Ligault, that they were dying of hunger, and that it was half an hour past lunch time. It was now she declared the ponies were lame, that she had done her best to get there before, and that she was really as much vexed as they at not having reached the trysting place as early as the rest. Madame Ligault was annoyed at herself at having told this fib, perhaps not so much at its being a story, as at the fact that she had taken pains to give a reason, an excuse for her long tête-à-tête with Monsieur de la Rocheconstant. Had it been any other of her admirers, including the three gentlemen who were now taking bottles, fowls, tongues, &c., from her hands, she would have replied, without putting her blushing face far down in the hamper, "So and so made such desperate love to me that even the ponies stopped to listen," or, "I was so glad to have a tête-à-tête with such a one, that I did not hasten." For the first time in her life, and to her astonishment, if not alarm, she was dissimulating; no one, however, seemed to notice this, and the *dejeuner à la fourchette* was soon ready under her auspicious management.

"Pray, *Cousine*, when did you receive the decoration of the Orders of Saint Maurice and Lazare, granted to none but brave officers by His Majesty, the King of Sardinia."

"King of Italy now, Count," said Mortimer.

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"Yes, to be sure; let us render unto Cæsar, etc., etc.; the King of Italy. When, where, and for what distinguished services did you receive that? Are you aware that it confers nobility on the wearer?"

"I perfectly understand and appreciate its value—it was given to me by the Duke de la Rocheconstant, in return for the decided energy and indomitable courage with which I stood the battery of the most *banal* compliments that it has ever been the lot of woman to listen to, and get weary of."

She had recovered herself a little; she could joke, but she looked up slily at him to see if he was displeased with it. He did not seem so, but said smilingly:

"And the Legion of Honour, Madame. Pray tell us the reason why that was bestowed upon so fair a wearer?"

"That," said she, "was given me for the perseverance with which I whipped the ponies, making them forget their lameness, so that we might make our *entrée* in something like good style."

"There," said Madame de Neris, who had been unpacking plates, knives and forks; "there, everything is unpacked, but where's the table? I declare you have forgotten the table."

Those who were proficients in the art of pic-nicing laughed heartily at her innocence and inexperience. After much explaining and many questions, she was at last made to understand that the cloth was to be

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laid on the grass, and those who wished to refresh the inner man were to put themselves in a like recumbent posture. At first she and the mustachioed lady received the announcement with the greatest horror, but they consented to it at last, for once in a way. They both afterwards fully entertained the idea that people in England, in the country, if not in London, took *all* their meals on the grass. This *was* something like barbarism, Madame de Neris had to confess, although she liked *Mortimare*, and judged him a gentlemanly young man; but as he assured her he was quite accustomed to this sort of thing, she could but write to her husband that "the English always eat off the grass," which announcement had such an effect upon him, that, by return of post, she got this question, "But when it rains?" which she at once answered: "Why they have their umbrellas. Did you ever see an Englishman without an umbrella?" This of course settled the affair in the old gentleman's estimation. Now a cleverer person than Madame de Neris might have come to the same conclusion, for as towards the end of the dejeuner it began to rain, all were agreeably surprised to find that Sydney, with a nice forethought, had ordered one of the servants to bring a number of umbrellas.

"Always does rain at a pic-nic, you know, Madame la Comtesse," he said, apologizing for having given the order to her servants. Of course after this

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Madame de Neris became confirmed in her original belief.

The rain came down faster and faster, and they were at last compelled to take refuge in the old chateau. But the sun soon shone out again; pic-nics are so rare in France that, as yet, the rain abstains from entirely spoiling them, but, I dare say, 'tis but *reculer pour mieux sauter*, as pic-nicers there will find out, when they become addicted to the pastime. Mortimer, who knew so perfectly the proper thing to be done at pic-nics, thought he would like to show them a little of the system of wandering away by twos and threes, so extensively performed at like gatherings in England, and without which a pic-nic, after all, is but a sorry affair. For what charm is there in eating a bit of fowl unsalted, (every one having forgotten that important condiment,) or a slice of plum-pudding cold, and over which the vinegar cruet has been inadvertently spilled, if 'tis not to know that after all these discomforts, you will be wandering alone with her or him, as the case may be, and can then tell the dear one all your bosom feels? But Mortimer felt a delicacy in speaking of this.

The weather was now provokingly bright, but the whole party having inspected all that was to be seen of the old chateau, were still together discussing the historical reminiscences of each room, or attacking each other in that light bantering conversation to which the French language lends itself more than any other.

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Madame Ligault shone prominently at that occupation, and made all present laugh much, except Mortimer, who thought it very nice for a drawing-room, but not orthodox at a pic-nic. Perhaps had Hortense de Frissac not been there he would have joined in the hilarity caused by Madame Ligault's *bon mots;* but he had been the guest of the de Frissacs nearly two weeks, his admiration of Hortense, although he had as yet scarcely spoken a dozen words to her, had become immense, and now he was aroused at the recollection of his own torpor by an intense desire for a long conversation with her.

Hortense was standing looking out of the window, chatting merrily with her governess. This lady was, as I have before said, English. She filled her difficult position satisfactorily, and received from this French family more consideration than she would have met with from nine-tenths of the English governess employers. Mortimer, who knew little of the rigid ideas entertained by the French, as regards all intercourse between young unmarried people, walked up to Hortense, and said:

"Mademoiselle, you are fond of botany; as we came in I observed a flower of a very peculiar species growing near the gate; the rain has ceased, will you go and see it?"

She looked at the Countess for approval, but she saw that her mother had not heard, or paid no attention to the question; that, moreover, she appeared agitated

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and unhappy. Young as Hortense was, and little as her father came to Chateau Frissac, she had often observed that her mother's step was less light, and her smile less joyous when the Count was with her—not that her mother was ever gay, a deep and settled melancholy was ever upon her face, but in the active superintendence of Hortense's education she seemed to drown care. The young girl saw that she could get no nod or shake of the head from her mother, to indicate acceptance or refusal of Mortimer's proposition; she therefore said she should be delighted, and left the room with him, the governess accompanying them. Upon examination the flower was found to be not of a very rare species, and a more wily girl than Hortense would immediately have perceived that there had been a little deception used to obtain the pleasure of her company. But Hortense saw nothing of the sort, and only laughed at Mortimer for having thought the flower a curiosity.

Some others of the party now began to walk off in couples, so it did not seem strange that Mortimer and Hortense should do so—especially as the governess was with them. The conversation was dull enough, and Sydney kept thinking how true it was that *two* were company, *three* a mob. He didn't much like the governess, though she was evidently doing her duty in mounting guard.

"So this is your first pic-nic, Mademoiselle; do you think you should like them?"

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"It's rather amusing—this taking one's dinner under the trees, with the entire absence of that ceremony which usually characterizes dinners; but beyond that, I see no particular charm about them; I suppose you must in England, or you would not be so addicted to them. *Is* there any particular charm to you in a pic-nic; and if so, what is it?"

Mortimer was about to tell her that it was exactly what they were then doing, rambling away under the trees, and what they were not doing, talking freely to the favourite one of the pic-nic, if not of all the world, that made them so delightful; but how could he, when that prim governess, the very model of propriety, was walking by the side of her pupil, ready to rebuke the least semblance of gallantry. "To tell you frankly, Mademoiselle, what it is that makes the difference is, that in France there is too much liberty among the married persons, and not enough among the unmarried," said Mortimer, in spite of the governess's nods and frowns.

"Oh, M. Mortimer; if you talk in that strain I must fly away with Miss Hortensia; you must remember you are in France."

"Liberty," said Hortense; "oh, I suppose you mean Madame Ligault. She's always talking about the adorers."

"No, I do not mean that."

"What do you mean, Monsieur Mortimer?" asked Hortense. The strict governess had stopped for a

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moment to cull some flowers. Mortimer profited by her absence and said:

"What I mean, Mademoiselle, is, that I cannot understand why a gentleman may not say a word to a young lady without having a third person by, listening eagerly to all that is said; that I fail to recognize the justice of the laws of a society which allow young widows, or even married ladies, to laugh and talk, I might say flirt, with gentlemen known to be not marrying men, and forbid a young girl receiving the attentions of an honest man. What right has society to judge that his intentions are not pure and honourable; and, above all, why should society intimate its distrust of the young girl by pronouncing beforehand her unfitness for even a partial liberty?" Mortimer spoke hurriedly, especially towards the end, as he saw that Miss Staybrook's bouquet was approaching completion. For that reason perhaps the words seemed to have greater force; he did not mean to say that he desired to offer his attention to Hortense. But it seemed to him, it was a fear of his saying something offensive to the young lady which had posted that governess off to follow them. She now joined them, and they returned to the party, whom they found in high glee.

An itinerant organ-grinder having passed, they had improvised a dance. The younger members of the party the real votaries of Terpsichore having strayed away, those who remained were the sober

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"Do you like dancing, Miss?" said he, by way of breaking the ice.

"Yes, *Monsieur*," answered timidly the young lady.

"You dance beautifully."

"Ah, Monsieur!"

"If that Italian manages the quadrille, may I have the honour of a waltz with you."

"With pleasure, Monsieur."

When it became evident that the supposed Italian could afford them no dancing music, Monsieur laughed and said, "How funny."

"Excessively," said Mademoiselle, as she sat down beside her mother, who was on a pile of coats, cloaks, and such like.

And this is the type of the French girl; she dares not speak freely with any young man before her marriage, and as a consequence, I suppose, immediately afterwards the up-to-that-time-restricted member wags fast enough, perhaps too much so; but Mortimer's moralizing on this subject is quite enough for the present.

We must relate another private conversation before the party all met at dinner. It is that which took place between Armand de la Rocheconstant and Madame Ligault, as they wandered through the deserted halls of the old chateau.

"What a good, what a noble Sovereign he was," said Armand, stopping to look at a bas-relief of

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Henry the Fourth over one of the large entrances to what had once been no doubt a reception hall. "Alas! France has had but few such as he; he rescued her from the pit of sloth into which she was falling, and placed her among the first nations of the earth. Even his bitterest enemies could but reproach him for his change of faith."

"Yes," said the lady; "one day he was a Protestant, and but a prince; the next day he was a Catholic and a king. Loving his country as he did, he may have judged it best to abjure his faith, his real sentiments, for he saw France had become the jeer and the jest of other powers; but, alas! how sad to see the brave and the noble commit actions that common morality revolts against; and, really, it seems as if in these shining marks Providence sees fit to point a moral. He had done wrong, for so we must judge it, and he died in all the zenith of his power and glory by the hand of a vile assassin."

The Duke paused a moment before replying, looked thoughtfully at Madame Ligault, and said, "I see you have another and more recent example of such a change in your mind. You refer to an event that has, as a result, placed France prominent among the nations of Europe; but we cannot believe that it was for her good alone a solemn pledge, an oath was broken. No, no, there was more selfishness in this case; there can exist no parallel between this person and Henry the Good."

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"Oh, oh! how political we are becoming," said Madame; let us at once stem the current, by reverting to something I understand better, and take more interest in. Here, in these silent halls, once sat amid her favourites and flatterers, lovely Gabrielle; 'twas with her as with all women, she loved but too truly, was faithful to the last; while *Henri le volage* went elsewhere with his homage. He had no doubt loved her, but then men are so false."

"Why, Madame, you are growing severe. You do not know how emphatically you have just condemned us."

"Ah, you jest, *Monsieur le Duc.* Did not Henri reply to Gabrielle, when she asked him to dismiss Sully, 'Darling, I would rather lose ten Gabrielle's than one Sully;' and she, poor dupe, neglected but still loving, clung to him to the last. How I pity such as she—like the poor fly, captive in its enemy's net, they struggle in the toils, getting themselves more and more entangled, while the grim tyrant, whose shackles they fain would break, watches their fruitless efforts with ill-concealed triumph."

"Happy the man who succeeds in placing Madame Ligault in such toils."

"Believe me, he would not find it so; but I do not think the time will ever arrive when such fetters shall drag me down."

"Do you school yourself, then, to be cold-hearted? And yet I thought one, if not all, of three gentle-

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men whom I could name, had cause to think otherwise."

A strange feeling of joy overcame her. The Duke had, perhaps unknowingly, made his last remark in such a tone as to show that he felt some annoyance upon that subject. She could but ask herself, did he care enough for her to be jealous of her actions? Somehow the thought gave her pleasure.

"A truce to trifling, Monsieur le *Duc*. You do not, I am sure, imagine me capable of loving any one of the three persons in question. I have my court; these gentlemen are my devoted subjects, you may think them my jesters, if you please, but in no one of them do I recognize a future consort; I could not abdicate my power for so poor a return."

"But your jesters have hearts, madame, or I suppose I should say your majesty, the smiles you bestow, the encouragement you give, may they not cause these subjects to forget the respect they owe their queen?"

"Hearts, I fear me they have none. The smiles of ladies whom we will not dwell upon, and an irreproachable 'get-up,' are their chief concern. Ah, had I the devotion of a true heart!" She paused, and seemed to muse.

"If there were one which throbbed but for you, whose only life was in your smile, whose every pulsation beat with the idea of some glorious deed, some meritorious service that might win your regard, your love, with such a one—"

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"With such a one I should deal as I do with my faithful subjects, referred to just now by yourself." She broke into her merry musical laugh, while he turned away in anger almost, certainly in grief. For a moment he had thought she possessed a heart framed for love, but now he was annoyed at himself for supposing even for a moment that she was capable of deep feeling. She appeared to him in a worse light than when his first judgment was passed upon her. Could he have seen what was passing in her mind, he would have taken her to his heart, and worn her there in defiance of all the world, yes, even of that duchess who sat in her grim hotel "between court and garden" in the aristocratic Faubourg. And yet so wayward are we all, so strangely constituted, she was flippant to him, tried to appear callous at the very time her whole heart was yearning towards him, as it had never done before to any living creature. She saw she had chilled him, knew that one word would suffice to dispel the cloud that was gathering on his brow, but she would not have uttered that word for worlds. Such is human nature, how strange, how perverse, how unaccountable!

"Well, Monsieur le *Duc*, how much longer are you to remain gazing at that wall. I must return to the party or I shall be scolded about the dinner as I was about the lunch."

"Pray let us go by all means," he replied, offering his arm. His tone was cold; he escorted her to

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the others, but not all her lively sallies on the way could induce him to open his lips, save to utter uncompromising monosyllables.

Madame Ligault found that in the dinner preparations Hortense had taken the lead. She had unpacked two or three large baskets, the contents of which were now laid out on the snowy cloth. Hortense had made a disagreeable discovery however; all the hard-boiled eggs had been despatched at lunch-time, and there remained none for the salad. Now, the Count, her father, was particularly fond of salad, and always insisted on a large supply of eggs with it. Hortense was determined he should not be disappointed, so she beckoned to Sydney Mortimer to come to her, and said to him, in her best English—"Monsieur *Mortimare*, there is no egg: will you please to get some for me? do not speak it aloud."

He did not speak it aloud; indeed it was very like a whisper, the tone in which he said that he would not only get eggs, but do any thing else in his power for her. It was arranged then that he should go off quietly to a farm-house near by and get the needed supply. Madame Ligault came to assist her in her preparations, the gentlemen having engaged in the juvenile and laborious pastime of seeing which could jump the farthest, with least amount of preparatory run. All, except M. Georges Morlot, who sat under a tree gazing at Madame de Frissac, as she industriously worked away at some embroidery. The



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Countess was in so deep a reverie that the sounds of his voice made her start, as he said—"How beautiful are those flowers! the rose the queen of flowers is not more brilliant in its hues than this. The real flower, poor beauty, lives but a few days at most, to fade away forever, while this fair image shall never die."

"Because it never lived," sighed the Countess. "A sorry boast. The life of the rose is as that of most women. They first appear blushing in maiden coyness, turning away their delicate heads from the too rude gaze of the sun; he encourages by gentle smiles, by tender beams, until at length, in full-grown loveliness, the fair flower looks to him for support, for life, while he, sad tyrant, now tired of the thing he coaxed into life, either scorches it with scornful heat, or sends blasts which chill the frail beauty at once and forever."

"I never knew you to moralize before, Countess: your simile is, I fear, too true a one. How many gentle hearts have been crushed by the harsh treatment of a tyrant, whose cruelty is but the more dreadful to bear, in that he is too well loved."

The Countess bent her head over her work. In speaking as she had just done, she had her own case in view no doubt; in answering her, it seemed as though he also referred to it; she would have no confidence, least of all with the Count's friend and ally, so she changed the subject of the conversation.

"Do you like this fête, Monsieur?"

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"I find it charming; to me the novelty of this al-fresco meeting adds to its enjoyment."

"As all seem to be pleased with this our first trial at pic-nics, I shall, I think, get up another soon. On Wednesday next, probably."

"Ah, but you choose the day the Count returns to town."

"To town! I was not aware, that is—I suppose Monsieur de Frissac forgot to acquaint me with his departure."

Yes, he had forgotten to tell her, or more likely deemed it unnecessary; but Monsieur Morlot knew of it; even this slight circumstance afflicted her, but 'twas always thus; to his wife he never told his plans, and her ignorance of them had more than once been the subject of remark among her acquaintances. For what reason was he going to town? How long was he to remain there? Perhaps, in one of his inconsiderate freaks, he was about to desert Chateau Frissac, not to return for the season, leaving her to play hostess to a number of guests, all as indifferent to her as she was to them. She was burning to know something of her husband's plans. But to ask M. Morlot what they were, no, she could not bring herself to that.

He saw her embarrassment, and divined its cause, so considerately gave her the required information without waiting for her to ask it of him.

"The Count, I believe, purposes going to Paris

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on Wednesday, with the idea of buying a pair of horses which, a Russian Prince, leaving the capital, a friend of his, is anxious to sell. It is not improbable, at least if I did not misunderstand Monsieur de Frissac, that from Paris he will proceed immediately to Baden, without returning to Chateau Frissac."

It was then, as she feared, he would go away in one of his restless fits, leaving her to make some shallow excuse to the guests for his cavalier treatment of them. It was not the first time he had done this, and some of her dearest friends had been irrevocably offended at his sudden departure.

"If you will pardon the liberty I am about to take, Madame la Comtesse," continued he, "I would suggest the utility of your using all means in your power to prevent this trip. There are several persons here ill qualified to brook the insult they would not fail to see in M. de Frissac's abrupt departure."

She tried to treat the suggestion as an impertinence. What right had he to point out to her a step to take, and that with her own husband. Alas! she remembered that he had the best of rights, that of the constant observation for years past of similar occurrences.

"If the Count desires to leave here, Monsieur Morlot, I can but wish it also; I have no desire to thwart his plans." Morlot bowed, and leaving her, joined the gentlemen. Her last speech was hypocritical. She knew it, and worse of all, *he* knew it.

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But, poor lady, she was not to blame; for years she had borne in silence the lack of that love which was to her the thing of all others most dear, and she was not now going to allow a stranger, a M. Morlot, to read her heart, to see it loving but unloved, and pity her accordingly. Her honour and her pride alike forbade it. This journey of the Count's was the more inopportune, in that she had not yet been able to have a private conversation with her husband, to ask his final decision in regard to the Marquis de Claremont Brezè's proposal for Hortense. 'Tis true de Frissac had said, "Yes," directly the proposition was laid before him; it was she who had demurred. But she hoped that on further reflection the Count would see the impropriety of mating thus the young with the old, the lovely with the deformed, the heart whole with the heartless. Could she have known that the Count had never once thought of the matter since! The absence of the Marquis had caused him to entirely forget it. Use her influence with her husband to prevent his departure! No one knew better than M. Morlot that she had none. She was aware of this, but would not even acknowledge it to herself. At one moment she was tempted to go to M. Morlot, to this man who, in a few short years, had obtained what she, in all her married life, had failed to secure, the confidence of her husband, and beg him to request the Count to postpone this journey. She feared that his sudden disappearance would

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cause the guests to suppose that some family quarrel, some disagreement with her, had caused his departure; she had borne enough of these mortifications. Yes, she would go to M. Morlot and sue for his coöperation in this affair. But, and the poor lady felt tears rising to her eyes, would he not prefer taking sides with his patron, would not her supplication to him be the subject of many a future sarcasm? No, she could not go to him—she felt alone, almost desolate in her grief; she could not go to Hortense for consolation, her only friend; she could not throw a cloud over that young existence; she could not trouble the summer sky of that young life. Why cause that happy heart a pang? "God knows," said the Countess to herself, "should she marry, as I fear she will, sorrow will but too soon claim her for its own. Oh, no! her eyes shall not be dimmed with tears for my grief."

She turned away in hesitation and doubt, and we will leave her to her anxiety, and return to Hortense, who was waiting with anxious expectancy to Mortimer and the "some egg" which he was to bring to her. At last she descried him running back at such a rate, that fears for his burden were at once aroused. He arrived safely, however, with his handkerchief full of the coveted eggs. He gave them to her very carefully, one by one. They would have made a pretty picture, as they stood there, both laughing and exulting over their treasure. Heated by his recent exertions, he was the very picture of health and manly

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vigour. She, with her delicate features and heavenly face, looked like some Peri, tempted down from her sphere by this noble son of earth. When the last of the dozen was handed to her, Hortense said, "You must help me to open them."

"Open them! Why, they are not cooked yet."

"Not cooked!" said she, abandoning her English in her surprise, and returning to her mother tongue.

"Of course not! I did not ask her for cooked eggs."

"But you should have done so: they must be boiled hard for the salad."

Sydney looked the picture of self-accusation, and Hortense sat down on the grass in despair. But Mortimer had been at too many "Gypsey teas" to be at a loss in such an emergency; to find some dry sticks, make a fire in an out-of-the-way corner, and boil the eggs in the ice-pan, was for him but the work of a few minutes. I must say that he took undue advantage of the momentary association entered into between Hortense and himself, to make something very like love to her. In her innocence, she did not comprehend him; seeing which, Miss Staybrook's mind was greatly relieved, and she allowed them to rattle on undisturbed. Hortense in all the importance of doing something useful for the first time, insisted on having his watch to time the boiling of the eggs. He gave it to her, and mechanically she placed the chain around her neck. Miss Staybrook looked occasionally from the Macaulay's History she was reading, but saw nothing that even her strict sense of the

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"proper" thought called for interference. A few moments passed by, and then Hortense drew out the watch, the water having attested its willingness to be of service, by noisily bubbling up; she looked at the watch again and again, then put it to her small pink ear, and finally announced that it had stopped. Sydney now looked and discovered that it must have stopped at the moment she had put it on. Hortense handed it to him, saying she would let the eggs boil until she had counted one hundred, to which task she devoted herself quite seriously. Sydney, fired with a sudden idea, drew a pencil from his pocket, tore a leaf from his note book, and writing something hurriedly thereupon he handed it to Hortense.

Now this was an effort at secret communication, which did not escape Miss Staybrook's observation; she could not allow her charge to receive notes from gentlemen, so rising to her feet, she advanced towards them, took the paper from Hortense, and said to Sydney, "What have you to say to Miss Hortensia that may not be repeated aloud? You will excuse my doing my duty in this matter, by handing this paper to the young lady's mother." So she strode up to where the party were seating themselves for dinner, and said, "Allow me, Madame, to call your attention to the contents of a paper Mr. Mortimer had handed Mlle. Hortense."

The Countess said, "Read it, Mlle.," meaning she should do so quietly. Miss Staybrook misunderstood her, and read out aloud the following:

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"My watch, my gentle friend, you say
Stopped on your breast—you're vexed I see.
The trinket on your bosom lay,
*And held its breath in ecstacy.*"

Quite contrary to the expectations of Miss Staybrook, the effusion did not awaken the indignation she had supposed it would, partly from the fact that half the persons present were not sufficiently versed in Her Majesty's vernacular to understand what it all meant. It is true that some of the elder who did, the more staid persons present, objected to it as being addressed to a young girl, but the majority pronounced it very clever, and Mme. Ligault declared she was dreadfully jealous of Hortense and desperately in love with Mortimer; in fact Sydney was the hero of the hour. Everybody called upon him for epigrams upon every subject: like most persons, when expected to be witty, he never was so stupid in his life, and was greatly relieved when the shades of evening began to fall, and it was pronounced quite time to return. This did not take place in the same order as the coming. The pony chaise had been driven back by a servant, and the large open *caleche* sent instead. So if there were any looking forward to a tête-à-tête homewards, they must have been disappointed; though no trace of any such feeling appeared, for as they drove up to the house those great oracles, the servants, pronounced it to be the merriest party that had ever entered the spacious halls of Chateau Frissac.



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## CHAPTER IV.

### LÈONIE.

It has been mentioned that Madame Ligault was the Cousin German of the Countess de Frissac. Cousins may be very nearly or very distantly related; they extend from the dear affectionate first-cousin unto that fortieth one we sometimes hear mentioned. Now, Madame Ligault was not the Countess's fortieth cousin, nor yet her first-cousin. These ladies had never seen each other until after the marriage of Madame Ligault, which took place some years since. In fact when she was nineteen, and she was now twenty-six. Her family, like that of Madame de Frissac, was respectable; unlike that of Madame de Frissac, it was poor.

Lèonie, the only child, became an orphan at the age of twelve; her parents had died, very poor, and consequently she was left to the care of an uncle, who did not seem much delighted at the charge. In fact, three months after the death of her parents, the young girl was placed in a convent, with the understanding that she was to remain there constantly, coming home

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for a vacation but once every two years. This vacation was to be passed at her uncle's house. The first time that Lèonie enjoyed this privilege, and before she had been two days with her uncle, she had wished herself back at the convent fifty times over. She who had been looking forward for two years with joy to this vacation, now reflected with delight on the fact that two years more must elapse before she could be called upon again to go through this ordeal. Lèonie was a precocious girl, but had she been one of the quietest tastes imaginable, she could hardly have supported the monotonous house of her monotonous old uncle, situated in a hum-drum village in the south of France. The best of friends must part, so luckily must the worst; and the day at last came when Mademoiselle Lèonie, bidding a not over-affectionate adieu to her uncle and the village (to her both were dull and uninviting), was set down with her boxes (not cumbersome or many were they) before the grim portals of the *Sacré Cœur*. The nuns welcomed back, with a true or feigned delight, this *chère enfant*. The uncle of the *chère enfant* was closeted some moments with the Superior of the convent, and then came out to say adieu to his niece. Although he grudged the money he had just paid, he was almost reconciled to the loss of it by the knowledge that he should see and hear no more of his sister's child for another two years.

Now, Lèonie had wished herself back at the con-

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vent: she had fervently prayed for the time to pass, so that she might return; but it is an extraordinary fact that once there she wished herself away again, anywhere, however, save at her uncle's house. The convent was better than that, but the convent was tiresome, irksome, and she longed for liberty. She could but own to herself, however, that the nuns were kinder to her than was her uncle, who was always telling her that she was a burthen to him, and that he could ill afford what she cost him. The sum, it is true, was small—heavens! how small in English estimation is a year's schooling in a convent in the south of France; but perhaps he told her the truth, when he said it inconvenienced him to pay those few hundred francs. Lèonie assured the nuns that she liked the *Sacré Cœur* better than her uncle's, and they, good souls, told her she had better renounce the palling sweetness of the world and become one of them.

Child as she was, Lèonie did not hesitate to say she would think of it; and she did think of it when alone, and determined that nothing on earth would induce her to don those melancholy veils and hoods, and live that life of miserable seclusion. No, Lèonie's looking glass, small and of wretched quality as it was, had already told her a pleasing truth. "The palling sweetness of the world," "Its sinful excitement," she had seen none of this at her uncle's; she had begun to doubt that life anywhere was brighter than at the

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convent. These good women frustrated their own object in pointing out to her that there were delights in the outer world; since the nuns denounced them they must exist, and she, like a true daughter of Eve, determined she would judge for herself. This thought made the convent very unpleasant to her. After all, it is not a gay place for a girl of sixteen, and nuns, each time they pass each other, crossing themselves, and repeating in a doleful tone—"*Sister we must die*," does not tend towards making it very joyous for the younger inmates. At last, when Lèonie was eighteen, and her vacation was approaching, she became more and more thoughtful; she had learnt all the sisters could teach her; knew herself to be a handsome young woman, and knew from hints that her uncle had dropped often and often, that hè would get rid of her as soon as he could. What was to be her future life? She certainly had food enough for thought. Would her uncle allow her to keep house for him, or did he expect, as did the nuns, that she should become one them? She was too old to remain a school-girl: the management of her uncle's house was certainly not a very tempting lot for her, even supposing he would consent, of which she was by no means certain. As she combed out her long shining black hair, she shuddered at the thought that, were she to become a nun, it must all fall before the scissors of some ugly melancholy-looking sister; as she gazed

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at the little mirror she felt the impossibility of shutting herself up forever.

At last the vacation arrived, and with all her anxious hopes and fears she returned to her uncle's dreary house. She was not received with much affection by her relative, her nearest, her only one. As soon as the tall-capped housemaid had left them alone, he dilated with apparent annoyance upon the fact that she had grown so much. "Why, you're a young woman now," said he, testily.

Lèonie said nothing; but thought that as a general thing females of eighteen were so considered, therefore in her case there was nothing extraordinary in the fact, certainly nothing to cause him such irritation.

"Yes, a young woman," growled he; "and I suppose I shall be obliged to go to the trouble and expense of looking out a husband for you."

This was an entirely new idea to Lèonie, not but that she had heard in the convent that girls did get married. One girl had been taken away very ill from the convent, and when Lèonie some time after asked whether she was coming back, or was dead—she was told she was married. She had never had any clear idea of what it all meant, had never had any confidences with her schoolmates upon the subject, knew no young men who were nice, or whom she deemed so, and thought her comrades quite foolish when they were busily plucking daisies apart leaf by leaf, saying

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as they did so "*He loves me—a little—a great deal—passionately—not at all.*" Moreover, she did not know a single person who was married. The nuns of course were not, her uncle was not, he had not been able to afford that luxury, he had sneeringly informed her. She met no young men at his house, saw but the curé—who, of course, like the nuns, knew naught of married life. The tall-capped housemaid being poor, crossed-eyed, and deeply pitted with the small-pox, was far removed from even the hope, far less the actuality, of wedded bliss; so that Lèonie's knowledge of it was, as will be easily comprehended, all things taken into consideration, but the most brief, in fact, might be said not to exist at all. But she was one of those to whom a hint is amply sufficient, and soon understood that this plan would settle the undecided question of how she was to be disposed of. Her mind was busy, here was food enough for thought. So after dinner she complained of fatigue, and asked her uncle if she might retire to her room. The gentleman assured her that it was a matter of indifference to him, so she at once left her amiable companion. The next day she learned from the housemaid that her uncle had started to the neighbouring town very early that morning, saying he would not be back before dinner-time. Until then she amused herself as best she might; inspected the dull village, and came back duller than ever. But she was full of one idea to the exclusion of all others. Her uncle had,

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she was sure, gone to get her a husband. She looked upon it in about the same light as though he had gone to buy her a dress; but then she had had dresses, though never a husband, and the thought created a great excitement in her mind. She supposed that as he had gone so far he would get a very nice one, else he would not have taken so much pains.

When she was summoned to dinner she found her uncle already seated at the table, and with him two gentlemen. One a man rather advanced in years, his real age was about forty, although Lèonie at once set him down as past fifty. The age of the other certainly could not have been a cause of complaint, he was about twenty-four. He looked neither older nor younger, but just his age. He seemed rather an invalid, and Lèonie noticed that he eat very little, while his companion devoured all that came within his reach. There was some unimportant conversation going on during dinner, but Lèonie took no part in it—no one addressed a word to her although the two gentlemen looked at her very much, the one almost constantly, the other during the intervals of eating. As soon as coffee had been served her uncle signified to her that she might do as she had done the evening before. She took the hint and retired. Now many young ladies in Lèonie's place would have gone to bed that night vowing to themselves their determination never to marry that ugly old *gourmand* of a man, and protesting it was the young, pale, rather good-looking one

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who should possess her heart. Not so Lèonie. Although she neither professed nor felt any love for her uncle she believed him fully capable of managing her affairs, and of choosing for her the husband who would be the most advantageous. Her heart, poor child, had nothing to do or say in the matter. It had not been touched by kindness, and knew not what love meant. She had gone through her childhood alone and unloved. She thought not of money; beyond her uncle's grumbling about that paid for her schooling, she had scarcely ever heard it mentioned. But her uncle had chosen a good school for her, a fitting home for six years for a motherless child, and now he was about to choose a husband for her, who was to provide a fitting home for her for the rest of her days. So she acquiesced beforehand in his choice, whatever it might be, and went calmly to sleep.

It was thus the affectionate uncle had managed the whole affair. The ride to the town in the diligence and the providing a dinner for the two persons who came back with him were the expensive part of his programme. The trouble was as follows:—

"Gentlemen," said the uncle, so soon as ever Lèonie had closed the door, and he heard her foot upon the stairs, "gentlemen, I rode over to your town today, and I have invited you to a good dinner at my house. I dare say you thought I had an object in taking so unusual a step. I had, sirs, and it is this: The young lady who sat at table with us this evening

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is my niece, she is an orphan and does not possess a sou in the world. I wish to get her married—she wishes it herself. I know you are each looking out for a wife, and therefore I have asked you here to know whether she would suit either of you. I have been at all this trouble and expense to provide one or the other of you with a beautiful wife."

"The young lady is handsome," said the pale young man.

"How much do you give her?" said the fat one, inclined to gourmandizing.

"Not a sou, I tell you," said the affectionate uncle; "I have nothing to give her."

"You'll never get her married on those terms," said the fat man.

"Then she shall remain single."

"Yes, and be an expense to you here in the house."

The uncle thought how true this was, and it is to be feared his mind reverted to his defunct sister with no gentle feelings. He turned to the younger man—"Well, Monsieur Ligault, have you nothing to say?"

"I cannot marry at present," was the reply.

"Then why did you come here, what made you eat my dinner?" Certainly M. Ligault had eaten very little of it. "Why didn't you tell me that, sir, when I invited you—you certainly did not imagine I did so out of love for you?"

"I cannot marry for a year," said Monsieur Ligault, musingly.

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"Then why did you not say so; why did you not, when I asked you to dinner, say, 'No, my dear Sir, no; in a year I will come and eat your dinner, in a year I can marry?'"

"But, sir, you said nothing about marrying."

"*Pardieu!*" said the Gourmand; "if one had to marry the daughter or niece of every friend who invited you to dinner—"

"You would have been married a thousand times over Monsieur Crouquetout. But if you will have none of my niece, I'll have none of your company. So, adieu—"

"But a night's rest and breakfast," insisted Monsieur Croquetout.

"You'll get both at the inn, where you'll not be asked to marry any one's niece; so, good night to you." And thus unceremoniously did Lèonie's uncle put out the fortune seeking Monsieur Croquetout, leaving himself alone with the other, of whom he now had but little hope.

"So you can't get married for a year, eh, Ligault? And why not?"

"I do not hesitate to tell you, as I think your niece, if as amiable as she is lovely, would be a wife who would render any man happy. In a year I shall be twenty-five, and shall then come into the enjoyment of a comfortable income, left me by a relative; I should not be able to marry before then."

"And then you will marry my niece?"

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"Not so fast, my dear sir; in taking your niece portionless, I am departing from a custom which has almost become law with us in France. If you will permit me to see your niece, to know her, to see if her mind is such as I desire my wife's should be, I shall esteem myself happy in having found such a treasure."

And so it was arranged, the generous old uncle incurring more expense in inviting M. Ligault to stop a fortnight with them, kindly allotting to the suitor an out of the way room, in which he usually kept his garden seeds and such things. Monsieur Ligault and Lèonie were constantly together during the fortnight of her probation, and its end found the pale young man seriously in love, and Lèonie glad that he should be so. He was kind to her, and she felt grateful to him. They both regretted that a year, a long year must elapse before the marriage; he because of being separated from her, she because it had been decided that she should pass the interval at the convent.

"You will write to me, dearest?" he said, as they stood at the melancholy entrance hall, saying good-bye. He had escorted her, accompanied by the uncle, to the convent.

"Write—must I—yes. Don't you think the Sister Superior might object to that? Besides, there'll not be much to write about here, in this old dull convent."

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"Write but one word, dearest, to say you wish the time were passed, and that we were married."

And so they left her. She wrote as he desired, and said with truth that she wished the time were past. Not that she doubted him, or feared that he might love another. She felt too sure of him for that. But she was tired of that eternal *il faut mourir*, now that the question of her life was decided.

"*Lèonie il faut vivre!*" she would say to herself, and *did* live in hope of a bright future. Every three days brought her a letter from the affianced. Long, loving, truthful letters. She wrote long and truthful answers; there was not much love in them, it is true, but he attributed that to maiden coyness. She had never deceived him in regard to the state of her affections; she had never sworn she loved him; that he was not distasteful to her was evident, and he was satisfied with this lukewarm feeling. Time wore on, the days which brought nearer to her the period of emancipation followed each other in slow and solemn succession. At last, fully equipped for departure, she stood in the entrance hall, and received the final adieux of the nuns and her schoolmates; at last the Sister Superior folded the affectionate Lèonie to her breast, and said with tearful eye, that she had once hoped entire devotion to the Mother Church would have been the dear child's vocation, but since it was not to be, she could only pray for her happiness.

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Lèonie heard those rusty gates close behind her for the last time, and thought, with a sigh, of the many true and noble-hearted women they shut in, who were lost by their own desire to the world and their kindred forever. Upon their ears must not that clanging noise fall like a prophetic knell, telling sad tales of never ending imprisonment, until death shall free their chains? For he comes at last—an unerring visitor, to palace and to prison, to voluptuary and to anchorite.

"Life is short and joys are fleeting;
And our hearts though strong and brave,
Still like muffled drums are beating
Funereal marches to the grave."

And now, once again, did Lèonie see that old house wherein dwelt her uncle; its façade was hardly more inviting than the gray walls of the *Sacré Cœur*. But she kept a light heart; she knew that within a few weeks she would issue from its portals, as she had from those of the convent, never to return—she would go forth with her husband into the gay world—into that world where the soft outpouring of the vesper bell draws together the light-hearted and the unfettered, not hooded devotees in penitential robes—where the *Pater noster* is oftener neglected than repeated, and where the omission is not atoned for by chastisement of the body and of the spirit—into the world of the birds and the flowers—of the pure air

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and the joyous sunshine. Yes, yes, Lèonie! said the young enthusiast, *enfin vous allez vivre!*

The marriage rites were performed; at first the young couple lived in the quiet town where the uncle went to seek her husband. Lèonie was happy here, even though it was not far from that dirty village in which her uncle lived. She often saw the gentleman who had rejected her fair hand, Monsieur Croquetout; she scorned to show spite, and even asked him to dinner on one or two occasions.. That the past had produced no unpleasant effect upon him was proved by the hearty manner in which he availed himself of the good cheer before him. About three or four months after her marriage, she received a letter from her uncle. This was indeed a surprise. He had never written to her in his life before now. To have done so must certainly have been a great trouble to the good man; but that he had been at no expense was proved by the fact that the postage was not paid. The letter contained very few words—it ran something in this strain:

"My dear Niece,

"I hope you will be very good to your husband, he has been very kind to you, in taking a girl without a *sou;* I would not have done it myself.

"Your affectionate Uncle."

Lèonie laughed at the contents of this letter, and thanked providence that all men were not like her uncle.

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If they had been, her chances of marriage would have been small indeed. But she was soon now to leave the little town which, up to this time, had seemed so gay and brilliant to her; she heard of other scenes and the possibility of her going to join in their gaiety, and could no longer brook the country airs of her guests, or listen to the awkward compliments of provincial clowns.

The second Empire which has since risen in might and power, was then struggling in its new-born efforts for life. Monsieur Ligault was a rising young man—a Bonapartist—had written several favourable articles on Napoleon, which had appeared in the village paper, when public opinion was running the contrary way. This was seen and noticed, and one day Monsieur Ligault received a letter sealed with the Imperial arms, requesting his presence at Paris. He went thither and learned that he had been appointed to an honourable post. It was a diplomatic mission to a German Duchy, which state was at that period quite hostile. France wanted no quarrel then, even with a weak prince. Monsieur Ligault was, therefore, instructed to be peaceful and conciliating in his policy, "*L'Empire c'est la paix;*" and thither went Lèonie with him. Here she was courted and fêted, her beauty admired, her wit praised, even royalty was attentive to her. Oh! this was life. *Oui Lèonie tu vis!* Balls followed balls, fêtes after fêtes, men pressed after her for a smile, women listened to her

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sparkling wit with wonder. She was the real queen of that capital; that stiff old German archduchess was only a fictitious sovereign beside the beautiful Lèonie. And her husband, what did he say to all this? He was proud of it, proud of being the husband of so beautiful a creature. She was to him all he could desire, kind, obliging, considerate, even affectionate, she was all this. Did she love him? No! but she loved no other, and the respect and gratitude she manifested to him incessantly, were taken by him at their just value. Alas! all this gaiety ended suddenly. Monsieur Ligault had been true to all except himself. His policy had been successful, but while he remained in that cold climate, accomplishing his mission, his already delicate frame had received a shock from which he never recovered. The couple returned to Paris, and Monsieur Ligault soon after died. Lèonie's grief was most poignant, for if he had not been her lover he had been a friend, a true and generous friend. So, for two years she went back and lived with her uncle in the melancholy old house, much against his will. But she would stay. "It is such a trouble to me, Lèonie," he would say. "But no expense, Uncle, as I pay my board."

While there, her past life came back upon her like a dream. She almost fancied herself a school girl again, and that this was one of the vacations in the dull house. She thought of the old convent, of



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those poor willing prisoners; she thought of the dreadful words, *Ma Sœur il faut mourir!* Alas! she had realized this truth. At moments she was tempted to return to those holy women, to join that band of sisters. But no; even in her misery, this she could not do; she felt it was not her vocation—she could not be false to herself.

During these two years she received several letters from the Countess de Frissac, begging her to consider the old chateau her future home. These ladies had met many times since Madame Ligault's first visit to Paris, and they entertained feelings of the highest esteem and friendship for each other. At the time Lèonie is presented to our readers, she had passed two summers with Madame de Frissac, and had quite recovered the shock which the death of a highly valued companion always gives. Her husband's fortune, which had been left entirely to her, was not large. It enabled her however to live comfortably, and indulge in those changes of toilette which afforded her so great a pleasure. She had fully determined not to resign her independence. During her short reign in that German capital she had been in circles where she herself was the only untitled dame; and yet, such were her powers of attraction, that duchesses, countesses, aye, even princesses of the blood had been deserted by their admirers for her sake. She had every thing, youth, beauty, wit; all she lacked was rank. She had "Dear Duchess'd" the one and "Dear

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Countess'd" the other, till she was tired of it, and would at least have liked to be "Baroness'd" in return. "But bah!" said the lively little lady, "independence above all!" Her pretty face she knew could do much for her; it had already obtained her a kind good husband for her a portionless girl, and had turned the heads of half the phlegmatic German noblemen whom she had met. But her heart had remained untouched, and she had resolved she would never marry again, unless——and here she made a mental reservation into which it is none of our business to inquire.

When Madame Ligault first saw the Duke de la Rocheconstant, she was pleased with his appearance, and felt in him that interest which all the feebler sex do for a man who is reported brave and valiant. She had heard of his powers, of his many escapes from danger, from the Count, who was proud of this Paladin, this brave scion of that race which caused the world to ring with praises of the chivalry of France, in those good times long gone by, when men preferred death to dishonour; when for "our lady" or "our king" they shrank from no peril, from no contact, save that of shame. Looking on him then with this interest, she was first pleased to find he had attached himself to her train, and then came the feeling that at last her time had arrived to love. She felt she had met her master, and against the idea she struggled; fearing, yet delighted—irresistibly drawn, as is one

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who gazes into a deep chasm, who would fain retreat, but is yet fatally impelled to look on until the brain reels, and with a sigh of helplessness, or mayhap a shriek of affright, the victim falls into the yawning pit.

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## CHAPTER V.

### RAINY WEATHER.

A FEW rainy days kept the party close prisoners in the old chateau. In English country houses, we all know how provocative rainy weather is to love making and consequent marriage engagements; but with our French heroes and heroines, it way be positively asserted that though there was a great deal of loving expressed and understood, it did not result in any thing serious, and the next fine day found the parties as untrammelled as before the rain. Still something had to be done to prevent dying of *ennui;* the gentlemen of course had billiards and the ladies fancy needlework, but as the day has at least sixteen waking hours, something else had to be devised besides these; so it was decided that the ladies should write stories for the afternoon amusement of the guests, and that they should draw lots to determine who should first exert her inventive powers. It fell to Madame de Frissac. In vain the lady declared she knew nothing of talemaking; the fiat had gone

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forth, the judges were obdurate. They showed leniency thus far; the story might not exceed fifteen sheets of letter paper, and they offered either to furnish the subject or allow the writer to choose one for herself. Madame de Frissac desired them to give her the subject, reserving to herself the privilege of selecting another if she found on trial that she was incapable of doing justice to the chosen one. There was a great deal of deliberation among the judges before the subject could be decided upon; at last Madame Ligault said she would think of one, and afterwards take the show of hands in regard to the applicability of her idea. This was unanimously agreed upon (the gentlemen having voice in the selection of the subject), and after a few moments spent in deep contemplation, *i. e.*, half burying her head in the red satin sofa cushions, and clasping her hands tightly across her brow—in which posture Armand thought she looked most charming, Madame Ligault announced that the title of the story should be "The Irish Heiress; or, Lovemaking Extraordinary." Every hand in the room went up at this announcement; everybody thought that would do admirably, except the Countess, who while fully appreciating this high sounding title, was heard to declare that it gave but little idea of a plot. Indeed, "lovemaking extraordinary," suggested difficulties. The authoress, by compulsion, was considered to be

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excessively exacting, so she was obliged to content herself with this meagre hint for a story.

"I trembled," said Madame de Chambellas to Madame de Neris, "if I had drawn the unlucky number, wherever should I have gleaned the incidents."

"I think there are incidents enough for more than one tale going on under our eyes at the present moment," said Madame de Neris, spitefully.

The tale was written, and the next day after the subject had been given her, Madame de Frissac sat in front of her auditory, and gave out in a clear voice the title, which was "Zuleika; or, the Pearl of the Orient."

"What, it's not 'The Lovemaking Extraordinary?'" said Armand. "I'm dreadfully disappointed."

"I found that subject too difficult," said the Countess, "so I availed myself of the privilege graciously accorded me by the judges."

"'The Pearl of the Orient,'—it's something about the East, perhaps?" asked one of Madame Ligault's brilliant (?) friends.

"Do you really think so?" said Armand. "What an effort of the perceptive faculties to guess that."

"Monsieur's remark," said Sydney, "reminds me somewhat of that made by a gentleman, who, after a long and minute inspection of that mysterious link which joins together never to be separated, that *lusus*

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*naturæ*, the Siamese twins, said in an inquiring tone and with great apparent interest, 'Brothers I presume?'"

This occasioned great laughter, and the poor young lack-brain who had caused it, tittered as loudly as the rest.

"Now for the story, Madame, please," said Morlot.

Intense jealousy of Madame de Frissac's powers precludes my inserting her beautiful fiction. The story was short, but met with great approbation; the only dissenting voice was the Count's. He did not approve of the title, or of the place where the scene was laid, or of the plot, or of the style, but everybody else said beautiful—exquisite, charming! After its points had been thoroughly discussed and admired, Lèonie discovered that there was yet an hour before dinner, and something else must be done to kill time. The rain was pattering against the windows, and the wind soughing mournfully through the great trees. "Oh how melancholy! let's have a game of romps," suggested the sprightly lady.

"I object to that, where there are unmarried ladies, Madame," said the correct, moustachioed Baroness de Chambellas.

"Very well, as you like. Then Mr. Mortimer must make us a Venus!"

Sydney, who during the reading had been sitting quietly in a corner, stealing furtive glances at Hor-

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tense, heard this announcement, and doubted his senses. "Make a Venus! What *did* she mean?" He thought he had misunderstood her, so he asked, "Make what, Madame?"

"A Venus!"

He could no longer doubt his hearing. She certainly had said he was to make a Venus! He knew he must be looking exceedingly stupid, and he felt the blood mount to his face when she said:

"You do not, perhaps, know the game, Monsieur Mortimer." Sidney was obliged to confess that he had never heard of it before then.

"Oh, it's very amusing," said Madame Ligault, "and only costs a few little harmless compliments."

The *modus operandi* appeared to be this—the gentleman called upon to make a Venus, denominates some one feature, perhaps more, from every lady present, to aid him in his difficult task. When this had been properly explained to him, Sydney could not help laughing at his own obtuseness, and then he said something very foolish about every lady there being so handsome, that it was difficult to choose. In his own heart, he confessed that *his* Venus was there, complete in all her attributes and ready to step forth sea-born to skim upon the waves. Another heart there was which said the same—but not of the same object. Like those distant soldiers on Crimean shores, who sitting at night by the dull camp fire, poured forth their souls in song:—

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"Each heart repeated a different name,
But all sang 'Annie Laurie.'"

But Sidney felt it would not do to compliment Hortense in too marked a manner. It seemed to him, therefore, the safest plan to choose a feature from each lady in the room, irrespective of age or good looks. But it behoved him to be happy in the selection; he must choose the feature of which the lady in question was most proud. Unfortunately no worse judge of human nature—that is of female human nature—than Sydney, could possibly have been found. He was, therefore, not particularly thanked by the lady, when he said:

"I should first choose Madame Ligault's nose." It has been mentioned that Lèonie's nose was *retroussè*, not much, but she knew herself that it was not a feature to adorn a beauty of the Grecian art-ideal.

"My Venus shall also have Madame de Frissac's eyes." This passed muster, though Lèonie thought he might have said *her* eyes; and so thought Armand, but he said no word.

"I should next take the complexion of the Baroness de Chambellas," said the Venus-maker. Now this was a mistake. Madame de Chambellas was past the age of personal vanity; she was moustachioed and sallow, but she cared not for that; she cared little for any thing but that one armed man and their quiet daughter. She had (certainly not without reason) expected that her name would not be mentioned, and

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was therefore rather inclined to view Sydney's choice as an unprovoked attack. Poor fellow! with the best feelings in the world, he had unwittingly given offence—perhaps caused pain! He saw this, and was sorry, but thought that a last grand *coup* would get him out of the affair capitally.

"And then—then I'd take Madame de Neris's *hair*," and Sydney glared around in triumph.

This was too much—Madame de Neris's hair! She wore a wig! oh, such a palpable, unmistakable wig, that it really seemed now as if Sydney had desired to crush the poor old lady with the weight of his sarcasm. But no, there he sat as unsarcastic looking a being as can well be imagined. He saw the fat pudding-like, snuff-brown curls which Madame de Neris always wore, and thought he would prove to the good lady, that young men had eyes for the perfections of the old as well as the young, of the fair sex. The lady herself did not know if she should be angry or pleased. That Sydney was not aware of the deceit, was evident. Well, then, she argued with herself, if he does not know it is a wig, the others do not. So on the whole she was happy. Unlike the good Madame de Chambellas (whose senior she was by some years), Madame de Neris did value personal appearance, and had no mean opinion of her own charms. Sydney had not referred to Hortense in this Venus constructing; he could not trust himself to mention any of the charms he perceived. Besides it

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seemed like indelicacy, this blurting out her beauties before them all. "Perhaps," he said to himself, "at some future day when with her alone, in a low whisper will I let her know how far superior to all the world I think her; but that must not be yet—not yet." As for Helene de Chambellas, she sat so far in the dark, behind that fond old father, that Mortimer did not see, and consequently, did not think of her. Even if he had, his task was now ended, as dinner was at length announced. What a great event on a rainy day is dinner! It seems to be a sort of culinary oasis, towards which the book-bored traveller is hastening. "I'll finish this chapter and then dinner will be ready," says he. But twenty times during the chapter, he casts his weary eyes upon the clock, and says, "Will dinner *ever* be ready?" And when it does come—when that most agreeable of all tintinabulations strikes upon the ear, or better still, when the Chinese gong bids him go forth to carnage, is not the spirit more elate, the heart gayer than ever it is upon the fine, the sunshiny, the easily occupied day? I am sure the guests of de Frissac Castle were of this opinion. At this dinner, as at others, the Maitre d'Hotel had been very stupid in placing the guests at table. He pulled out chairs, and pushed people into places, the last they desired to occupy. He might have known that Armand wished to sit next Madame Ligault, whereas that gentleman found her ensconced between two of her admirers, the very two he most

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disliked. Out of respect to the ladies he overcame a strong desire which took possession of him to forcibly dispossess the two gentlemen aforesaid of their seats, and merely cast upon them a withering glance, which was so significant, that in the future the offenders were less eager in securing seats on each side of the fair widow. Madame Ligault saw that glance also, and became suddenly very gracious to the gentlemen in question. Armand scowled at her, but she heeded him not; never had she been gayer than at this dinner. There were no quiet little conversational duos; Madame Ligault was the life of the party. She answered questions on her right, kept up a political discussion on her left, and made the Baron de Chambellas, who sat opposite to her, perfectly irate, by saying:

"Cæsar was a greater general than Napoleon."

"Mistake, Madame, great mistake, Cæsar's greatness is all traditionary. How can we tell how much truth there is in it? No, Madame, Napoleon was a model for succeeding generations. When he marched forth into battle, it was victory or death."

"Of course, with a decided preference for the former," retorted the provoking widow. "Is it not so, Baron?"

"Yes, if victory could be attained without dishonour," replied the Baron enthusiastically.

"He certainly was a great *strategical* leader," said the widow, with a wicked emphasis upon the word *strategical*.

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"Great, in every way, Madame—first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen."

"Oh, come Baron, that is a leaf out of an American book—Washington was that."

"And Napoleon also, Madame, Napoleon also. I know no hero but him, nor should any Frenchman."

Madame de Neris, sitting next Mortimer, now managed to say a word in private to the youthful admirer of her snuff-brown locks; she aroused herself to an attempt at English, out of compliment to him, and soon became perfectly unintelligible.

"You like dem cattles, in Bretagne *j'ai* very fine cattles, when you have your great *exposition* for fat ones, I say to Monsieur de Neris, I send Jeanne to Angleterre for *medaille.* Jeanne very fat cattles, but *jugez de mon desespoir*—I was at so much despair when I find that instead of fat—what you call *veau* in English?"

"Veal," said Mortimer, abstractedly.

"Ah, well! I find that she no fat, but it is because she have a little veal—*j'etais au desespoir!*"

Sydney made a violent attempt to refrain from laughing, but it was quite ineffectual; he laughed, not a gentle quiet laugh, his usual one, but a horrible loud ha-ha, which was so violent that at last he resorted to the extremity of holding his sides. Madame de Neris was quite astonished at his hilarity; in fact deemed it a mild case of idiocy.

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"I can't bear anybody but Roger now," said Madame Ligault.

"Roger, I thought he had lost his arm," said Madame de Neris, who was beginning to feel alarmed at Sydney's continued mirth.

"I am speaking not of the opera singer but of a dressmaker, not of a *he* but a *she*."

"A thousand pardons, Madame," said Madame de Neris sharply. It was evident no love was lost between these ladies.

"What makes you so silent, Cousin Frissac," asked Madame Ligault of the Count.

"Listening to your wit, dear Cousin!"

She looked at Morlot, but did not like to accost him; he was an enigma to her; he always treated her with respect, but seemed less impressed with her beauty and wit than were the rest of the gentlemen. No, she would let no shafts fly in that direction. "Monsieur le Duc, I think you have mistaken your vocation; you would make the best pall-bearer in the world."

"Indeed, Madame."

"Yes, indeed! though it's only since yesterday you've worn that agreeable mute-at-a-funeral expression. If it continues I shall be obliged to beg my cousin to bid you good-bye, and ask you where you will have your letters sent."

"Am I then become so repulsive?"

"Absolutely unbearable. No life, no spirit, no

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energy; so ferocious too, I'm really afraid to approach you."

"Indeed, Madame, then I fear I have nothing left but to hang myself."

"A capital idea, and I shall have a bit of the rope, it is a lucky talisman you know," said the black-eyed coquette.

The ladies now rose, and the gentlemen accompanied them, as is the custom in France. It is only a feint, however, for as soon as their fair charges are safely lodged in the drawing-room the gentlemen take flight to some undiscovered smoking regions, from whose bourne they rarely ever return, even to say good-night to the ladies. At least they do not in Paris; in the country, having no theatres or clubs to go to, they generally manage to give the light of their countenances to the ladies after the smoking bout. This was the case at Chateau Frissac, to Madame Ligault's intense satisfaction. She therefore sipped her coffee and talked fashions to the ladies with a quiet heart; she knew that better company than those stiff prim dames and unfledged demoiselles was coming when the cigar was finished. It was finished at last, and the gentlemen began to return to the drawing-room. Lèonie begged Hortense to play—she did so.

Hortense de Frissac was a perfect musician. She seemed to make the piano speak—no thundering chords and then mighty silences, all was melody,

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soft, heart-touching melody. Helene de Chambellas succeeded her; though not so thorough a musician as Hortense, nor possessing so wonderful a control over the instrument, she was no mean performer; but her natural diffidence was so great that she broke down, and had to retire in confusion in the middle of one of Beethoven's sonatas, a *morceau* which, when alone, she played with brilliancy and correctness. The consequence was that Lèonie, who took her place and played a few polkas and waltzes, seemed by far her superior in the accomplishment. A little dance was extemporized, and Mortimer, for the first time, spanned with his strong arm that tapering waist he had so often admired. Hortense was an excellent waltzer, and the two spun over the waxed floor in fine style. Poor Helene had been victimized by one of the Messieurs Shallowpate; but as she danced *à deux temps* and he *à trois*, their dance was neither marked by grace or comfort. Armand sat moodily in a large arm-chair, appearing to listen to the platitudes of Madame de Neris, who having lost all hopes of inspiring a tender feeling in Sydney's breast, was now turning her attention to the Duke. But in reality he was straining his ears to catch a conversation that was going on at the piano, apparently an interesting one, too, between Lèonie and the principal of her adorers. "All's fair in love or war" was his excuse for this attempt at eaves-dropping.

"You are really too cruel; you take away the

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warmth of your smiles, and leave us nothing but the coldness of your frowns."

"But I don't frown," said she.

"It were better perhaps if you did, for then we should all know there remained no hope for us your poor benighted slaves."

This declaration, interesting as it was, was now put a stop to by a general rising of the guests, which resulted from the retiring of the De Chambellas family. Madame de Frissac, with Hortense soon followed suite, so that no ladies remained save Madame Ligault, and the would be attractive Madame de Neris. The Count suggested cards, which proposal met with hearty approval.

Madame Ligault said, "Then let it be lansquenet."

"Lansquenet," repeated Madame de Neris; "a man's game, fie."

"Yes, said the Duke, "by all means let us have lansquenet; I like a game where all's chance, where skill can do nothing for you—it's like life; for talk as you please about high resolves and noble determination to resist temptation, the stream will carry you on in spite of yourself; chance rules supreme."

"A fatalist!" said Madame de Neris once more greatly shocked—gently, compassionately shocked, a feeling quite different to her horror of Lèonie's words and actions.

"My cousin will begin the deal, as having first proposed the game," said the Count.

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Lèonie did so quite willingly, and was in great luck; she won several times in succession, and at last had quite a sum before her. "Thirty-two louis," said she in great glee; "who bets?"

"Banquo, Madame," said Morlot. She won again.

"Sixty-four Louis," said she, hesitatingly; she was getting out of her latitude. "Who bets?"

"I stake four louis," said Madame de Neris.

"And I the sixty," said the Count.

Lèonie protested that she felt ashamed of playing for such stakes, and that she hoped she might lose; but again fortune favoured her. "One hundred and twenty-eight louis," said Lèonie, all in a flutter, heartily wishing she had gone to bed long before. She was really annoyed, but feared that were she to show any desire to withdraw it might be supposed she wished to save her winnings. Especially as Madame de Neris kept energetically advising her to do so.

"Oh, are you going?" said Lèonie, as one of the moths who was not playing rose to leave the room. "Monsieur Morlot will you play for me, I wish to speak to that gentleman." She arose, put her arm through that of the young man, and took him off to a quiet corner, where she began an animated conversation, spirited yet whispered.

Armand was disgusted. He was indignant—and this was the woman for whose sake he had almost resolved to sacrifice . . . . but no, after such flip-

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pant conduct, he would never, no, never again think of doing *that*. Could he have heard her conversation!

"You will go to Roger's, and tell her I must have my Italian peasant dress for Saturday—the whole ready for immediate wear. Then pass by Estés, and tell him that my last new boots were like boats, he must make the next smaller. Any thing else—Ah, yes; please to go and get my fan. You leave tomorrow morning I believe?"

"Yes," replied the youth, rather annoyed at the idea of rising at six o'clock.

"Good night, a speedy return," said she.

"You may rely on me Madame," said he, making a shield of his hat and bowing low, with feet in the first position.

Lèonie returned to the table, and found that Morlot was still winning with the hand she had given up to him. Madame de Neris, who had lost another four louis, was in a towering rage. The pile of gold had wonderfully increased, to the intense chagrin of Lèonie, who determined no one should ever catch her playing at lansquenet again.

"Cousin," said the Count, "what are you going to do with all that money; make it a gift to a hospital, or tempt some unlucky wight into inconsiderate matrimony?"

"No, indeed, I cannot afford to *give* away my money, and will never *throw* it away. I have in my

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eye a diamond necklace which Bassot has earnestly recommended to my careful attention. To the acquisition of that bauble will I devote these unholy gains, should no one take pity upon me, and win it all back."

"Unholy, indeed!" groaned Madame de Neris.

The Duke who saw that beneath her apparent levity, Lèonie was vexed at having gained so large a sum, now interposed.

"Madame Ligault," said he, "your luck is inconceivable. I make the *Banquo*, but upon condition that, should you win, you at once retire. We can't stand any repetition of such fleecing."

She was grateful to him, and appreciating his giving her an opportunity to go, said, "Well, Monsieur le Duc, now for my Waterloo."

I may state here, for the benefit of those of my readers who are not *au fait* with the game of lansquenet, that the term banquo is used to signify that one person bets the whole amount at stake to the exclusion of the other betters.

"I have a queen for me," said Lèonie. "I shall lose. Ah! a knave for Monsieur le Duc, of *course* he will win." So he did.

"You wretched creature!" said Lèonie. "I shall at once retire; the fall from affluence to the deepest poverty is more than my poor nerves can bear; as for you, cause of all this despair, I shall not speak to you for a week. Good night all." Armand fol-

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lowed her to the door. He held out his hand. She put hers in it, and gave him a smile that caused the blood about his heart to flow quicker. He forgot his anger at her flirting; he thought of nothing but those beautiful black eyes which, at that moment, beamed so lovingly upon him. He pressed her hand tenderly. "Good night," said he. "Will you think of—" He paused. The loving smile was gone; it was replaced by that which had made such havoc in the German Duchy; brilliant, coquettish, piquant, but not loving. She was no ordinary woman; she never could surrender without a struggle; and having caught herself yielding to her feelings, she had at once applied the curb.

He was vexed at the sudden change, and now remembered his resolve of steeling his heart against her. She was playing with him; he could not allow that. He was no moth. He returned to the table, and as he did so, noticed that Madame de Neris had been watching his short skirmish with Madame Ligault.

"Are you ill, Duke?" said she, "you are quite pale." Now, this was spiteful, and really untrue, as he was quite red with annoyance.

"No, Madame, I am not ill," he replied sharply; but at once repenting, he said to the old lady, with his usual politeness: "Allow me to conduct you," seeing she was about to leave the room. With a curtsey, worthy of the days of Louis the Fifteenth,

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she left him at the door. He bowed in like stiff and formal manner, and she sallied out, leaving the gentlemen alone. It was now quite late, but the gentlemen showed no inclination to retire. Armand remained silent, almost morose. He was vexed at that parting. His luck seemed to increase instead of diminishing; and he was continually being annoyed by some one of the party repeating the old adage (started, no doubt in the first place, by some unlucky gamester, who needed a consolation, however meagre), Happy at play unhappy in love. It really seemed to the Duke as though those present were aware of the state of his feelings, and were trifling with him. He was angry at himself for having allowed Lèonie to see how easily she could move him, and for having implored her to think of him. "Yes, she would think of him, no doubt, laugh at the victim so easily entrapped, count him as an additional conquest, and glory over her easy triumph. It shall not be of long duration," growled he between his teeth.

"Well, Duke," said the County rising, "you will give us our revenge some other night: it is now late, almost three o'clock; I shall retire."

"I play no more after to-night," said Armand. "I think it likely I shall return to Paris to-morrow. He who wants his revenge must play to-night. We are not children to go to bed at a certain hour." They glanced at each other; that his frame of mind was not pleasant, was plain to all.

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"I'm getting deucedly sleepy," said Morlot.

"Let's be off, then," said the Count, and bowing, they both withdrew. Mortimer rose.

"Stop, Monsieur Mortimer, I have won a considerable sum from you; remain, and take the chance of winning it back."

"Or of losing more," said Sydney, laughingly. But the Duke was in no mood for jesting. He fancied he saw an implied insult in Mortimer's words, so stepping near Sydney, and drawing himself up to his full height, he said:

"Sir, do you mean to imply that I requested you to continue, because I hoped you would lose more than you have already done?"

"I meant to imply nothing of the sort," said Sydney goodnaturedly. "I meant to imply that I was tired and sleepy, and that I did not want to play any more."

"If you will not play any more," said the Duke, with a wild air, "you shall take back what you have lost, as it will not be in my power to give you your revenge: I shall leave here to-morrow morning."

As he said this, the Duke mechanically took up a handful of notes and held them towards Sydney.

"M. de la Rocheconstant, this is an insult, and were it not plain to me that you are labouring under some annoyance, foreign to the subject between us, I should resent it. I wish you a very good night;"

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and the British lion threw up its mane, and walked off to slumber.

"I liked that fellow, too," said Sydney, as he got into his bed. "By Jove he must have been tipsy or mad to-night." He heard a low rap at his door just as he was beginning to doze. With an idea that his valet was bringing in his boots and hot water at some extraordinary hour, he called out—"Come in," and was somewhat surprised to see the Duke enter his chamber. Sydney, rubbing his eyes, gazed at his nocturnal visitor with anxiety. The Duke made some speech while crossing the threshold that caused Sydney's honest face to beam with pleasure; at its termination he seized the Duke's hand and gave it a vigorous shake.

"Don't speak of it again, my dear fellow. I knew you were not quite yourself: come, what had annoyed you?" Armand was only too glad to have a confidant, and in a few moments Mortimer knew that which the little widow Lèonie Ligault would have given her eyes to be sure of.



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## CHAPTER VI.

### ABOMALIQUE'S BLUE CHAMBER.

The more Madame de Frissac reflected on her husband's near departure the more she grieved at his resolve. If the Count realized the hopes which he had held out to the Marquis de Claremont Brezè, by bestowing the hand of Hortense upon him, would it not be most unseemly for the Lord of the Manor to absent himself just at the time when the engagement must be announced to their guests? What would the Marquis think of such conduct on the part of his future father-in-law? Morlot had said that there were persons at Chateau Frissac who would resent (by going away themselves) the implied slight of this untimely pleasure-trip, taken by their host. Morlot referred to La Rocheconstant and the young Englishman no doubt. But there was something the Countess feared more than this; it was the scandalous tongue of Madame de Neris, the virtuous surprise of the Baron and Baroness de Chambellas, and the well-meant indignation of the exacting Lèonie. The

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sparkling widow, during her different visits to the Chateau, had more than once seen the sad face, and heard the sharp word which caused it. Men had been such slaves to her, that Lèonie could not understand or bear to see a woman's heart in such complete thraldom.

"Dear Cousin, if I were you," began Lèonie, on several different occasions.

"You would do exactly as I do, Lèonie; that is, if you were wise. Believe me, the back is always suited to the burden." It was not so in her case; but she would not confess that. And so Lèonie never had an opportunity of giving her well-meant advice.

A hundred times Morlot's words had come back to the Countess. "Use her influence to prevent her husband's departure." And why had she no influence with him? Why would he never listen to her proposals, or grant her smallest request. Had she been a bad wife to him? Thoughtless, heartless? Had she even for one moment during her married life ceased to love, honour, and obey him? Never! She declared it proudly to herself—never! Why then had their marriage not been God's joining together, but a slavish bondage imposed by man? Because *he* had married without love; because he had no taste for domestic joys, while she could not relish the so-called pleasures of gay Parisian life. A quiet home, with a loved mate, surrounded by smiling childhood; this was her dream of happiness.

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"You should have married a cottager, then;" he often said derisively. And so it went on: years did not soften his temper, nor could they make her fonder of the world in which he took delight.

"I will make one more effort," she said. "I must see him alone, for to-morrow the Marquis will be here; the next day, Wednesday, the Count will go. Oh, no, he will remain; he cannot be so indifferent to the opinion of our guests." So saying she left her room, and descended to the large corridor.

"Where is Count de Frissac?" asked she of a domestic.

"In his study, Madame. Shall I announce Madame to my master?" said the valet.

"No, thank you."

Should he announce her coming to her own husband? She paid him few visits, indeed, but she need not be announced like a stranger. Thank heaven it had not yet come to that. She stood before the door of the study. Strange as it may appear, she had never entered that room. It had been fitted up for the Count's private use, about two years before, and in the winter, when he went away, he took the key of it with him. Had there been more time for deliberation she would have waited till she found him alone, in some of the other rooms, or till he came to hers, perchance. But the Marquis must have his answer for the morrow, and the news must be broken to Hortense. She tapped lightly on the door.

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"Come in," said the Count.

She turned the latch and entered. Well might he take the key of that room when he went away! Blue Beard's wife, when she stood in the fatal chamber, could not have gazed around with more horror than did Madame de Frissac, at the abode of this new Abomalique. The walls were adorned with pictures (some drawn by his own hand) of celebrated opera dancers, race horses, fighting dogs, belligerent cocks, and rat killing terriers. A general atmosphere of smoke pervaded the room, ends of cigars lay about the floor, crushed into the rich Turkey carpet. Bronze copies of the principal statues at the Louvre, were placed here and there upon tables and consols. The clock represented two lovers in a close embrace, which she supposed to be Faust and Marguerite, from a crouching Mephistophiles at the base. The writing desk was covered with little notes, which, as the Countess approached, she saw were written in different female hands. The Count and Morlot were discussing one of these epistles when the knock was heard at the door. If the spirit of all the departed de Frissacs had appeared before the Count he could not have looked more aghast than when he beheld his wife. What could have brought her there? If it had been any pressing emergency the Countess might have sent for him; but to come thus in person to his private room was not to be borne.

"Madame, you have mistaken the door.

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"No, *Monsieur*," said the wife, "I came to speak of an affair of business."

"Indeed! I was not aware that you had such weighty matters to attend to. Pray come in."

She did so, and now it was that she observed the letters addressed to him in a dozen different female hands. She heaved an involuntary sigh.

"Ah!" said the Count. "Something melancholy as usual. Morlot, that's a good fellow, just hand me down that handkerchief box, so I may select a large one for this unhappy occasion."

His raillery was jarring, but she must begin.

"Monsieur de Frissac, I wish to have a few minutes conversation with you—a *private* conversation."

"Go on, pray do. You know Morlot is discretion itself."

Here Morlot attempted to retire, but was prevented by the Count, who insisted on his remaining. She must then speak before Morlot. He must hear this conversation—this one in which she had resolved to try once more, even at this late day, if her husband's heart was lost to all tenderness for her. And now he bid her begin her demands in presence of that man who stood gazing out of the window, but listening perforce to every word. Since this was, she would be as brief as possible; he should not see her attempt to exact influence which she did not possess.

"The Marquis de Claremont Brezè returns to-morrow, Count."

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"Does he? I am delighted to hear it. He'll tell us if the new comedy was a success, at the Français last Saturday."

"You know the object of his coming to-morrow?"

"Can't for the life of me conceive what particular object he may have for coming to-morrow, more than any other day."

How could she keep up a serious conversation with a man who talked like this! How bring her own mind to bear upon this subject, when Monsieur Morlot stood there humming an air from *Traviata*, and rattling on the window panes with his long white finger nails!

"I told him that to-morrow I would give him our final answer to his demand of Hortense in marriage."

"*Our* final answer! My dear Countess, you forget that I gave him my final answer ten seconds after he asked me. It doesn't take me so long to make up my mind as it does you."

"But, my dear Count, have you reflected well on the subject? Is it a marriage which will be conducive to the happiness of our dear child?"

"My dear Countess, I have reflected on it enough to show me that in marrying this gentleman Hortense will become Marquise de Claremont Brezè, wife of a nobleman of the old regime, and possessor of an immense fortune. She will be a leader of the *ton* in Paris, and *chatelaine* of one of the finest places in

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France. What more can she desire? *I* desire no more."

"But suppose Hortense should not consent to this marriage?"

"She knows the alternative, Madame—a convent. That has happened more than once in France. I need not remind you of that, Countess."

"Henri."

"Let us talk no more about it; this is an alliance in every way satisfactory, and one which shall be made. I am determined." And he looked determined.

So she said no more, except, "Then we may consider it as an affair settled? I shall now go to Hortense."

"Do so; but pray tell me if this was the melancholy affair which caused all those deep-drawn sighs, or have you any thing else to say to me?"

She would have given worlds to ask him not to leave the chateau at least for a week or two; but she looked up at Morlot, and saw an expression of pity and commiseration for her, depicted in his countenance. No! she could not bear a rebuke before *him*. She smiled on her husband, bowed coldly to Morlot, and left the room. Her heart was not light as she entered her own. This was the man whom she had loved as a young girl loves once in her life; this was the man she still idolized; this cold sneering worldling who, when she went to lay bare her heart's

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tenderness before him, said, "You have mistaken the door." She could bear it no longer. Her proud spirit rebelled against such treatment. But what could she do? Confess to the world that she, Countess de Frissac, loved a man who loved her not, and that man her husband? She would be a fit mark for ridicule, "to point her slow unerring finger at." No! she would bear on in silence that which she had supported during so many years. "But up, up to thy duty, sad heart," said she; "thy work is but half done; thou hast humbled thyself before the father; now announce the tidings which may perhaps break the heart of the child." She rang a bell.

"Request Mademoiselle de Frissac to step into my boudoir."

She soon heard the young girl's step; the soft elastic tread upon the floor. Never before had she heard that sound without a thrill of joy, and now it made her heart sink. Hortense entered with a smiling face, and received the usual loving kiss on her brow.

"My love," said the Countess, "sit down, I have serious news to communicate to you."

Hortense drew nearer, and looking anxiously into her mother's troubled face, she said, "Dearest mamma, what is it? You alarm me."

"Nothing that need alarm you, Hortense. Were you like many girls of your age, fond of pleasure, of excitement, of admiration, worldly, in fact, I might



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announce it as the most welcome of all tidings. My child you have been asked in marriage."

"By whom?" The young girl's face was tinged with a roseate blush, and the usually languid eyes were sparkling enough now.

"By the Marquis de Claremont Brezè."

The colour fled and left her marble again; there was a pause. "And what did you reply, mother?"

"I would give none till I had spoken to you, dearest. I still withhold my consent if this marriage is unpleasant to you."

Hortense leaned forward and kissed her mother, who continued, "It is my duty, though, to tell you, my dear child, that I have seen your father, and he is so determined the marriage shall take place, that he declares if you demur you must take the consequences of his displeasure."

"That is," said the young girl bitterly, "he will immure me for life within the walls of a convent."

The mother could not answer, she saw that her child thought of this marriage with repugnance, and she dared utter no word lest she should strengthen that heart to rebellion against her father.

"A convent is not so bad, perhaps," said Hortense, musingly; "at least one is mistress of one's own feelings there; one is not the property of a man—above all such a man as that. Mother, I think a convent would be preferable to marrying him, don't you?"

"A convent, child! Where I, your mother, who

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have lived but for you—would die for you—will see you but on certain days, will converse with you but on given subjects, will press your hand instead of your cheek, will see the sad smile which will replace your childish laugh, will know that your thoughts are not on earth, but on heavenly joys, will feel that you live still but that you are dead to me." She threw herself back and gave way to a paroxysm of tears. Hortense was startled, she had seen her mother sad, ill, and desponding, but then she had uttered not one word of complaining, much less shed tears. What had now caused the ice to break and the current to flow, with overpowering, unresisted force? It was love for her child, and her fear that Hortense would be taken from her. In a moment Hortense had thrown her arms around her mother's neck.

"Dearest mother, don't cry; I could not leave you to be a nun! I will marry him—indeed I will, and I'll never leave you nor the old chateau. I'll make the old marquis promise that. I know he will consent, and for that alone I will love him. I'll marry him, and then we'll send him off travelling with papa, and you and I will stay here reading about the gallant knights and dames, just as we have always done. And our noble lords will come back on their noble steeds, and we'll wave them welcome from our casemented hall, just as they did mother—those ladies fair, in the old, old time." And thus with many a soft word and gentle caress did the sweet girl charm

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back the smiles into her mother's pale lips. She told her that when she was Marquise she would take precedence of her mother, plain Comtesse. "So you'll please to treat me with proper respect;" and the laughing girl, with an assumed air of hauteur, strutted about the room, till the mother, although she knew her daughter well, actually thought Hortense had become reconciled to the marriage. "Four o'clock, I declare, mamma—I must go now. Monsieur Talexy will be here at half-past to give me my lesson, and I don't know a note of the 19th *Etude*. But if he says false, false, Mademoiselle, I'll say, No, I am true as steel. If he says time, I'll say time was made for slaves, not for the Marquise de Claremont Brezè." She raised her hand with a theatrical gesture, and ringing out a merry silvery laugh, she ran away. She had succeeded in her object, made her mother believe she was willing to be married, and Hortense was happy.

Oh! how relieved the Countess was. At one moment she feared she had noticed in Hortense a slight preference for the young Englishman; she believed now she was mistaken. This belief might have been shaken could she have seen her daughter bathed in tears, and lying on a couch in her own room, whither she had flown directly after she had left her mother. That Hortense had a preference for Mortimer—that his looks, his actions, were more to her, more than those of other men, the poor child now regretfully confessed to herself. In all their conversations they

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had never once departed from the tone of light and graceful badinage, so pleasing to persons of their age. Not one word in any way approaching love had ever been spoken by either. But Hortense knew that Sydney preferred her to any person in the chateau, and Mortimer saw that his gentle glances did not meet with frowns in return. How long they might have gone on thus, without any change in that delightful uncertainty of feeling, Hortense could not tell. She only felt that the bride elect of the Marquis must no longer allow even this harmless state of feeling.

All conversation with Mortimer must cease—nor would she permit herself to speak in such warm terms of him to Miss Staybrook; for to her governess alone had she mentioned his name. Miss Staybrook always replied to Hortense's admiring speeches by saying that he was but a fair type of the English gentlemen —no more. She had not rebuked her pupil, nor had she given her encouragement. Hortense knew that now it would meet with Miss Staybrook's disapprobation, did she even mention Mortimer. She resolved to reconcile herself quickly to this marriage. Although her heart was partly given to another, it was only partly, and then she was so uncertain in regard to Mortimer's feelings. Was it not likely that his few amiable speeches were made without any other motive than that of saying something agreeable to a lady? Was it not more than likely that when he left Chateau Frissac he would entirely forget her, or only

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remember her as a friend? At all events, it was her duty to obey her parents, and in marrying the Marquis she was giving the greatest possible proof of love and affection for that amiable self-sacrificing mother. So she dried her eyes, dried them of the first and last tears they ever shed on account of the Marquis.

When the servant came to announce the music-master, Hortense went to her lesson with almost her usual elastic step; and though the nineteenth *Etude* was in a sad state, she had schooled herself during the time which should have been devoted to it to a far more difficult task—that of doing her duty as a wife to a man she did not love.

Meantime the Countess de Frissac sat in her luxuriously furnished boudoir, and thought over the events which the last few days had brought forth. In spite of Hortense's evident aversion when the news was first announced to her, the mother believed that the child, untrammelled by other ties, would soon view with complacency the approaching change in her position. Had her daughter not laughed and joked on the subject afterwards? But her mind now reverted to that private room, where the Count was reigning monarch, and M. Morlet prime minister, the doors of their sanctuary being closed upon *her*. She thought too of those letters, all in different hands; some wretched scrawls, others firm and well-written. This galled her. That the Count was cold to her was no new discovery. She attributed it in part to

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the apathy of his nature, but it was evident now that beauty could and had charmed him. This was a fresh grief—it was the drop which seemed to overflow her cup of bitterness.

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"Well, sir."

"From your manner towards me lately a fear has crossed my mind—that fear is that you should imagine I use that influence in a manner prejudicial to you."

She was silent.

"Believe me, if you do entertain such an idea you wrong me, Madame. I have too great a respect for you and admiration for your virtues, even to harm you by word or by look."

Again she did not reply: that this man should have it in his power to *harm* her with her husband!

"Madame, these are the only words I ever spoke to you in private, and as you no doubt desire it, they shall be the last—forgive me, then, if I appear brusque; your husband does not pay you the homage you deserve, because he does not appreciate your beauty and your worth."

It was then, as she supposed, Morlot knew of her husband's indifference to her—had no doubt received his confidence about that *other* or *others*, who had found the way to his heart.

"That he loves you, Madame, I am sure."

"You think so, Monsieur Morlot?" asked she, eagerly; and Hope, the deceiver, came and whispered in her ears such tales; they made her heart beat strangely.

"I am sure of it."

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"Oh, Monsieur, if you knew what happiness it gives me to hear you speak thus."

"I do know it, Countess; there is no happiness which can equal that which is experienced by the fond heart in finding its love returned."

"You really think he loves me, Monsieur Morlot?"

"I would stake my life upon it; the Count is unfortunately a little spoiled by too free a life, bad associates, and the adulation paid by the world to rank and fortune; in fact he is too secure in the possession of all his blessings to appreciate them at their proper worth. He needs some little cloud to cover his horizon, some unexpected care to awaken him to the value of his treasures. He should be made to feel a fear that he might lose them."

"Might lose them, Monsieur Morlot? I do not understand you—you surely do not for one moment imagine that I would stoop to awaken my husband to the value of that 'happiness which he now possesses,' by any other than the legitimate means of a wife, her affection and duty."

"Madame, you love him, 'tis your *duty* to lead him back to the path he has deserted. That the fault lies principally at his door, I well know, Countess. But when you use the word *stoop*, in relation to your husband, you give me reason to think there is some foundation for the Count's assertion that you are haughty and unbending."

Poor lady! how undeserved was this thrust; but

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she thought Morlot was speaking his real mind, and she respected him for expressing his honest opinion.

"The duties of a wife are many, M. Morlot. I have always tried to fulfil mine. It appears from what you say that I have failed; if, then, you can suggest any thing, since you are my husband's friend, and kind enough to offer advice, I can only say I shall be but too happy to try and inspire the love I so much covet."

"I have told you, Madame, that you already possess it. It merely lies dormant. May I speak freely, Madame, may I be your friend?"

She hesitated, she had so few friends—she knew the danger of such an one as this. But with her the ruling power was love. She feared nought. "You may, Monsieur Morlot, speak freely; what do you think?"

"Madame, your husband sees too little of you. You know the old proverb, absence conquers love. Your constant presence with your husband is necessary—you should be more with him."

"But, Monsieur Morlot, none more than yourself know that it is out of my power to be more with my husband than I am. You know Monsieur de Frissac leaves to-morrow."

"I thought you desired his presence, Countess, that his departure would grieve you; so I obtained

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from him a promise that he would defer his trip to Baden to some later period."

"Oh, many thanks; this gives me heartfelt pleasure." He had acted then, his assistance was not all words.

"I wished to prove to you, Madame, that my most sincere desire is to bring your husband back to your feet, a suppliant for that love he has seemed to undervalue." The vision made her draw a long breath of pleasure. He continued, "To gain that object we must cure him of a folly he is about to commit." She looked at him inquiringly. "Pardon my going into details, Madame, nothing but the seriousness of the danger will excuse it. But I must frankly put you *au courant*. The Count, giving way to a feeling of vanity that all men are imbued with more or less, is at this moment in the toils of a shameless creature, whom to mention in your presence is to honour too much. Lost to all sense of virtue, she ridicules those home ties which Monsieur de Frissac has been inclined to neglect."

This explained the letter she had seen lying on the Count's table, this explained his eagerness to get away from the chateau—she shuddered.

Morlot continued, "I would not willingly betray confidence save in so good a cause. Before I act you must be assured that what I assert is true." He drew from his pocket a paper, and handed it to the Countess. On it there was a rough sketch of what

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was intended to be a handsome bracelet, to be enriched with diamonds, and to bear inside the inscription "*Pensèz à moi.*" Underneath was written, in the Count's hand, "Bassot, jeweller, Rue de la Paix (here followed the instructions, respecting the size and value of the diamonds), to be sent as soon as finished to Mademoiselle X., of the Comedie Française." She read and then returned the paper.

"How came this in your possession, Monsieur Morlot?" asked she.

"The Count was not pleased with his own design for the bracelet: I suggested some slight improvements, and he asked me as a favour to make a new copy according to my ideas, and to enclose it with some orders of my own to Bassot.

"And you will do so?"

"Most undoubtedly, but the bracelet, when finished, instead of being sent to the Theatre Français will find its way here."

"But that will anger the Count."

"I hope by that time, with your valuable aid, to have cured him of his folly. This lost creature, on whom he is squandering his wealth, and what is more valuable—his time, laughs at his assiduities and ridicules his obtuseness; could he but be convinced of this, I think he would be forever cured, for he believes the woman loves him."

The Countess raised her eyes to heaven, as if imploring its support in this new sorrow.

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"The folly he is about to commit is this—this woman has complained of the incompleteness of her apartments, the shabbiness of her furniture, in fact, hinted to the Count that she would not be displeased were he to hand her a paid lease for three years of a suite of apartments on the Boulevards, and a receipted upholster's bill for all the furniture it can contain. The Count, Madame, desires to make her this present, which I need not assure you with Monsieur de Frissac's ideas of *savoir faire*, will be a costly one."

Morlot paused, and looked at the Countess to see the effect this announcement would have upon her. It did not appear to startle her as much as he imagined it would. If the truth were known she had paid very little attention to these details; the great shock was over, the poor wife knew now that her husband was unfaithful to her, and whether he gave diamonds or furniture was a matter of little consequence.

"A very costly present! For besides this, the Count has talked of buying two carriages and four horses for this infamous woman, by way of a surprise on her birthday." He paused again; but still she answered not. He almost thought she had not heard him.

"The Count asked me what sum I thought would cover this outlay, and we both agreed that it

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would not fall far short of three hundred thousand francs."

He thought the largeness of the sum would startle her, but it did not seem to have any effect.

"Now, three hundred thousand francs is a large sum. Your tastes, dear Madame, are of such an inexpensive nature that the Count, at any other time, might have made this present without feeling it; but now that Mademoiselle Hortense is about to be married, her dowry must be paid, and her *trousseau* bought: thus there is a double shamefulness in pandering to the luxurious tastes of a mistress, while debt must be incurred to provide a necessary outfit for the child!"

She heard now and understood how well this man knew all their private affairs. Her eyes were all ablaze, and the colour came and fled her cheek. She grasped his arm nervously, and said, in a hollow low voice—"How can we prevent this! Say! say!"

*We!* Never had the pronoun struck upon his ear with such a dulcet cadence. *We! he* and *she!*

"The woman's gross infidelity to him shall be laid bare before this money is squandered, believe me. I shall put my plan into practice to-morrow. Will you see me, and let me report my progress?" He saw a slight movement of the head, but heard no sound, though her lips moved affirmatively. "Thanks. Fear not for the issue. He shall yet be restored to you; trust in me. I do this as I would for one of my

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own kin, Countess. For years, Madame, my feeling for you has been like this. I have always—shall always, cherish the deepest gratitude for—for—the Count, Madame, your husband!" She felt a pressure of the hand, and then knew that Georges Morlot was gone.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### A DREADFUL ADVENTURE.

It was in vain Armand, as he stood on the green sward in front of the chateau, made a trumpet of both hands, the better to convey the sound of his voice to Lèonie; in vain she leaned out of the window of her room on the second floor, striving to catch his meaning. Just, as in despair at not being able to make her hear, he was about to go after a servant to take his message to her, he bethought him of pantomime, and began accordingly a brisk walk up and down, with one arm akimbo. He seemed to be keeping up an animated conversation with some person, supposed to be hanging on that arm, and glanced up occasionally at Lèonie to see if she understood. She was laughing merrily at this novel way of communicating ideas; but she understood it all so well, that she hastily donned hat and shawl to grant his request, which was, that she should go for a walk with him. Delighted at his success, he stood waiting for the fair Lèonie to descend; she

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did so in a few minutes, took his proffered arm, and the two walked off in the direction of the park.

Though the distance from the lawn to the second floor prevented him from being heard, a pair of eager listening ears, which habited the first floor, caught the first sound of his voice; and a pair of eager eyes in the shade of a discreet window blind saw the subsequent pantomimic display. The young people had, perhaps, been out of sight some five minutes, when a female figure, a stout hearty one, made its appearance on the lawn, where, a few moments before, Armand and Madame Ligault had met. This was none other than Madame de Neris, who had seen, with modest horror, this invitation to a matitudinal walk, almost before "the early village cock hath thrice given early salutation to the morn."

It was shameful, it was indecent! It shocked the good lady's idea of propriety, and she determined she would save that giddy young woman from the snares of the destroyer, and that she would then not fail to report the enormity to their hostess. She would steal upon the Duke and that careless (she hoped she was but careless) woman, and hear enough to condemn them from their own mouths. Yes, she was determined unperceived to hear something of a conversation which was so private that it could not take place in or about the chateau. She was full of her most laudable design; but one thing tormented Madame de Neris, the imprudent (she hoped not guilty pair)



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had disappeared as she was descending from her chamber, and she was uncertain which course they might have pursued. The park was large, innumerable alleys traversed it in every direction, and she was but an indifferent pedestrian; but her laudable motive gave her more than usual vigour; so she set out with a strong rapid stride which betrayed how great was her anxiety to save that giddy (not guilty) woman from her great peril. But Madame de Neris went at a pace quite beyond her strength; her will was strong but her limbs were weak, and although her anxiety augmented, her speed diminished as time wore on. At last, when almost spent, she arrived at one of the park gates.

The keeper was absent, but his wife was in the lodge. Seeing a stout elderly lady heated and evidently fatigued, the good woman rushed out with a chair upon which Madame de Neris fell with a sigh of relief. While reposing, with a most diplomatic ambiguousness, she put several leading questions to the gate-keeper's wife. "Had she seen any persons near the lodge that morning," was asked with such a mysterious air that it bewildered the woman. "Any persons" was emphasized so strangely that the woman at once supposed that poachers or perhaps robbers were the sort of *persons* referred to. Madame de Neris forgot, in her eager excitement, that unlike herself, the whole world was not *au fait* with the disgraceful doings she knew of.

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"Persons!" repeated the gate-woman in a half-scared voice.

"Yes, a lady and gentleman," said Madame de Neris.

"Yes, Madame," said the evidently relieved gate-woman. "A gentleman and lady have passed through the gate; I let them through just before your arrival."

Madame de Neris was overjoyed—she was close upon them. They had gone so far in their shamelessness as to actually leave the park: in fact, they were braving public opinion—they would be met by the people of the village, and then it would be too late to save that careless (she fervently hoped not guilty) woman.

"Let me out at once," said Madame de Neris with renewed energy. She was obeyed, and having obtained egress, she marched as swiftly as she could down the dusty road. I have said above that Madame de Neris' will to overtake those she sought was greater than her power of so doing; a ten minutes' walk in the road rendered her almost incapable of further exertion. Just at the culminating point of her benevolent expedition, she met a boy driving several donkeys. This boy usually attended, each morning that the weather was fine, at Chateau Frissac with those donkeys for the use of the ladies who chose to indulge before breakfast in a ride. Now, with the exception of Madame de Neris the ladies

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were liberal patrons of the boy. Her size precluded any graceful mounting of the patient steeds, and besides, Madame de Neris had a lively recollection of her first and last donkey ride, on which occasion the brute had walked into a pond and laid down with her on its back to the utter ruin of one of the sweetest silks that enlivened her remembrances of her young ladyhood: in fact, she often confessed that Monsieur de Neris was so disgusted with her draggled appearance, when rescued from her donkey and dirty bath, that he cooled in his attentions (he was then becoming quite serious in these same attentions), and almost deserted her for that hateful Nathalie, her cousin. But another dress of a similar pattern, and a ridiculous fall Nathalie had out of a cherry tree, into which she *would* climb, brought back the heart of her vacillating admirer. Donkeys! she hated them, and she hated donkey boys; this she always loudly asserted, each time those in question appeared on the lawn, in front of the chateau. It will be easily understood that the donkey boy had no great partiality for Madame de Neris; in fact, I may here admit that he had in his heart vowed he would pay her off some day, were it possible.

In his estimation donkeys were all that could be desired for riding, and as he slept in the stall of one of those under his charge, petted it, and looked upon it as his best and truest friend, he resented for its sake Madame de Neris' expressions of contempt and dis-

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like for the whole tribe of them. Glancing in a surly manner at the lady, and causing his donkeys to kick up much more dust than was necessary, the boy was passing on, when suddenly Madame de Neris called out to him to stop. That she had not done so at once proceeded from the fact that she had often, too often perhaps, abused this very boy. She had hesitated and would no doubt have allowed him to pass on unquestioned, had she not heard at that moment the distant village clock strike. She started—time was flying—no more of it must be lost. That careless (she now said hesitatingly) not guilty pair must be saved.

"Boy, come here."

He seemed about to pass on unheeding the request, when she held up to his view a piece of money. He paused, looked irresolute, and then came up to the lady. She handed him the coin and said, "I wish you to answer me a few questions and also to go on an errand for me." He scraped his forehead assentingly. "Have you seen a gentleman and lady pass down the road?" said Madame de Neris, eagerly—too eagerly perhaps; her emotion made the boy understand that she would be pleased to hear that he had seen the persons she was asking about.

Now he had seen no one and he was about to say so, when her eagerness caused a wicked idea to enter the donkey boy's head.

"Do you wish to overtake any one?" said he.

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"Oh, yes, I must, if possible, overtake that gentleman and lady."

"They are not far off," said the boy, pointing over his shoulder, down the road. He would send her on a fruitless errand. He rejoiced at it, she looked heated and fatigued, the road was dusty, and now that the power of the sun was felt, an unsheltered walk was no pleasant affair.

Madame de Neris started forward, walked a few steps and then called out again to the boy. "I cannot go any further," said she, renouncing in despair her plan of overtaking the parties. "You must run after them, say that they have been noticed, and that they must at once return to the chateau."

"I cannot leave my donkeys," said the boy. "But, mum, if you want to overtake them, just mount quiet old Grizzly here, and in no time you'll find them." Alas! what a situation for donkey-detesting Madame de Neris, but much can be accomplished when we are moved by a strong resolve. She must, oh, she would save them! A thought just then entered her mind, perhaps they were about to elope! Heaven! With an energetic bound, she caught the pommel of the saddle, with several vigorous scrambles she climbed into it, and striking the donkey frantically, she started at a spanking pace down the road. Now, here again, that wicked donkey boy had committed a great fault. He had given to Madame de Neris a brute that the whole country knew, but to dread. It was obstinate,

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vicious, and always ran away. No one in the neighbourhood would have mounted it, and on no account would the boy have dared to offer Grizzly to any other of the Count's guests. None but strong men, wishing to indulge in a lark, ever attempted riding this donkey. The boy gazed at him as he ran down the road, with a look of amused triumph. Even to him, revenge was sweet, for, after all, donkey boys are human. This one having watched Grizzly until he disappeared, rushed to his favourite, the meek-eyed, mouse-colored Fanny, and embraced her with demonstrative affection—(she invariably shared his pains and pleasures), after which, he started them all onwards to the chateau. He well knew that the morning rides would all be over ere the unfortunate Madame de Neris again appeared. With tail erect, ears laid flat upon his neck, and uttering that by no means agreeable sound called braying, Grizzly ran forward at his full speed. This accelerated motion was at first rather agreeable to Madame de Neris; indeed, could she have induced the donkey to be silent (she feared the noise would betray her presence) she would have been well pleased, but silent he would *not* be. Patting, and "Now do be quiet, that's a good beast," and "Be quiet, sir," were all of no avail, the unfortunate lady was borne on as if on the wings of the wind, instead of on the back of an ass. He reared, he tossed, he brayed, but still he ran; huge drops of perspiration ran down the fat cheeks of the lady, while

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she became painfully aware that the saddle was not padded, and that a nail was making itself sensibly felt. And still he fled, like Mazeppa's courser, which stopped not for mountains or for dales, for roaring torrents or fiery sands, still he sped on—this humble prototype—till the park left far behind, he bolted into the forest, and having run some distance through the trees, to the imminent danger of his own, as well as Madame de Neris's limbs, he suddenly stopped. "Thank good—" but her sentence was doomed never to be finished. Kicking out his hind legs most ferociously, the donkey next poised himself upon them, and threw its forelegs high in the air. This manœuvre entirely disconcerted the rider—once, twice, and and then the remorseless brute scampered off, leaving what had been a spirited though rather indiscreet old lady, a huge, but powerless lump upon the grass. Dead she was not, though her first idea on coming to consciousness, was that she had been buried alive. Thoughts of the hated Lèonie also presented themselves, and she attributed in some way her present woeful condition to the sprightly widow. She was aroused by a rough voice, that said in an almost unintelligible *patois:*

"What are you doing there?"

She had heard, even in her half-fainting state, a man's step approaching, and her heart grew lighter—it was Armand come to rescue her from death, and

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carry her back tenderly to the chateau. It happened unfortunately to be no such thing.

"Get up, I say. What are you doing here?"

She raised her eyes slowly and painfully, and they fell upon the figure of a tall, sinister looking man, so poorly clad that he was scarcely decent. His loose jacket, ragged and greasy, looked most suspiciously like those worn by the prisoners confined in the penitentiary, in that part of the country.

He carried a fowling piece, which he deliberately pointed at the recumbent form before him. Madame de Neris, on discovering that it was *not* Armand had resigned herself to fate, closed her eyes quietly, and sunk back softly on the grass. "Get up old woman," said he of the weapon and greasy jacket. To hear is to obey with persons in her unfortunate position. In an instant she was standing up straight before the dreadful apparition, his terrible look made her quake.

"I don't want to detain you, old woman"—Thank Heaven, thought she—"So you be so good as to off with that bracelet, there are robbers in the forest you know, therefore I had better take care of your valuables. Come give me that bracelet!"

She looked around, to see if no angel was near at hand to help her. The man pointed his gun. She gave the jewel to him.

"Now that watch and chain, if you please." This was fearful—the gift of dear Monsieur de Neris, who was quietly installed in their comfortable home in



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Brittany. But it was a just punishment for her desecration of his virtuous image, by her sinful admiration of that hateful, hideous Armand.

"Come now, no fooling, give me that watch." Just Heaven, in its wrath, ought to have sent its lightnings to strike the unfeeling brute dead on the spot, but queerly enough it did not do so. Reluctantly, oh, how reluctantly, dear Monsieur de Neris, did she hand thy gift to the fiend.

"Now just add to your kindness by taking off that gown. Come, off with it!"

She cared little for the value of the dress, though it was one of her favourite *moiré antiques*, but her modesty was now in danger.

"Take off my dress, leave myself— No, man, I will not do that. You may imprison me, torture me, shoot me, but you shall not taint my name." The man seemed about to take her at her word as he pointed the gun at her once more, this time cocking it, the click fell ominously upon her ear.

"Oh, don't shoot, sir, pray don't, it is not the value of the dress, don't you see? If you will kindly accompany me to Chateau Frissac, I will send it down to you by my maid, indeed I will."

The creature shook his head, and said something equivalent to his not being quite so verdant as that.

"Man!" she exclaimed, for a new idea had struck her. "It is my honour I defend! Do you not respect

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a woman's modesty? Have you no mother, no sister, no any thing?"

It was evident he had nothing of the sort, for he only made an impatient gesture with the gun, and began again to work at the lock of his weapon. She had tried all her resources, and all had failed, she was just wondering if the man was stone, when it occurred to her that she had heard of "ladyes faire," who had won the hearts of these highway robbers. She determined she would try what her powers of fascination might accomplish. So, smiling sweetly, she stepped close to the man. A sudden burst of all her buttons, and then the robe was dragged over her head by the ruthless hands of the fell destroyer, there she stood robeless, and oh, horror, wigless! For in his efforts to pull off the coveted dress, the wig had been displaced, and now remained in the hands of the robber. He laughed loudly, nor did all her entreaties to be allowed at least to keep *that*, prevent his stuffing it into his pocket, saying as he did so:

"It will sell for something. And now, farewell, good dame," said he, "and here's to prevent your modesty suffering," throwing her the greasy jacket, he made off, leaving the poor creature at a loss as to which way she should turn to retrace her steps to the chateau. By dint of searching, she at last got into the right path, but not until she had passed hours in the forest, and as the sun was going down, she arrived, foot-sore and weary, at the front entrance of the cha-

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teau. The porter, seeing a strange figure meanly clad (for Madame de Neris had perforce donned the man's habit), about to enter the grounds, at once interfered.

"Where are you going?" said the man, as he looked suspiciously at the woman wearing a man's coat, with her head tied up in a white cloth. "Where are you going, what do you want?"

The poor lady glanced piteously at the porter. He had always been so polite and respectful. She named herself, said she was a guest, and that she must enter at once. For some time she strove in vain to convince the man of her identity, and even when he seemed to grant that she was what and whom she represented herself to be, he insisted on accompanying her to the house.

"I must get in the back way," said she.

"Oh, no, Madame. You will please come with me to the hall entrance, and I will then call the servants to you."

He was evidently still suspicious. There was no help for it, and so to the hall she went. Once there she found it vacant—the servants were waiting at dinner. It was the usual hour for that meal. The porter rang the bell, and Madame de Neris congratulated herself; she would of course at once convince the servant who came, of her identity, and would run up to her chamber, replace the lost capillary attractions, and make herself as presentable as she could.

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She would have preferred going to bed, but that would have attracted attention! even as it was her continued absence must have caused uneasiness. The porter rang again and again before a servant appeared. At length one came, at once recognized Madame de Neris, and admitted her. The lady was passing on towards the stairs, when the dining-room doors were thrown open, and Madame de Neris, in her queer attire, stood face to face with the hosts and their guests. A stare of amazement, and then a shout of irrepressible laughter, greeted the poor lady. She did look so queer, her head-dress was so rakish, the ragged jacket so unusual a garment for a lady's wear, that, spite of politeness, and that tact which so seldom deserts good society, the laugh was almost general.

The Countess came eagerly forward, questioned Madame de Neris, but all in vain. She saw that woman for whom she had incurred such dreadful things, such present shame and annoyance, standing near her, laughing as though she would never leave off, and leaning with familiarity which quite shocked her upon the Duke's arm. To his shame be it said Armand was also laughing convulsively.

Poor Madame de Neris, she was to be pitied. In all her agony of mind she remembered that Sydney believed that the snuffy locks were real; now he would know that they were not, Nothing remained for her in this emergency but to faint. This she

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accomplished with a slight effort, falling into Sydney's unexpectant arms. With a servant's assistance he carried her up to her room, where she was consigned to the care of her *femme de chambre.*

It was afterwards discovered that the man who had robbed her was an escaped convict. He was caught, and her valuables recovered. It was also ascertained that Grizzly was by no means a lady's nag, and Madame de Neris, in her horror at her last donkey ride, quite forgot the less fearful consequences of her first attempt. It was noticed, however, that she ceased abusing donkey boys so openly as she had done, and it was also remarked that she never could account satisfactorily for her solitary walk on that eventful day. The whole affair remained enveloped in mystery. The donkey boy and the gate woman asserted that she was in chase of a gentleman and lady, but their names never transpired.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### A SURRENDER AT DISCRETION.

It is but fair the reader should become cognisant of the conversation which so greatly aroused the curiosity of the unfortunate Madame de Neris. Without the slightest thought of or effort of concealment, the young people took one of the principal alleys of the park, walked to its farthest extremity, and then, as Lèonie said she felt rather tired, they sat down upon a stone bench, old and moss-covered. Their conversation up to this time, interesting enough doubtless to themselves, was of such a nature that even the scrupulous Madame de Neris could have found little fault with it. They spoke of the host and hostess, of the guests, and while Lèonie could find no words strong enough to express her admiration and love of Hortense, Armand enlarged upon the manly qualities and noble generosity of Sydney Mortimer.

"I can understand a woman's loving him. So noble, so generous, so handsome," said the brave fellow enthusiastically.

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"He is indeed all you say. Is he in the army? for you and he are so much together now we might almost style you the modern Damon and Pythias. I suppose you know all about him?"

"He is not in the army. Beyond that I know nothing about him, except that he is one of the best fellows in the world."

This, with observations on the weather, and a few like uninteresting topics, formed the gist of their conversation; that is until they sat down upon that unlucky bench. For a few moments they were silent—both seemed wrapped in thought. Suddenly Armand exclaimed:

"I suppose Monsieur Lebète will not stop much longer in Paris?"

"Now I think of it! I forgot to tell him to go to Felix for my wreath of grapes. What a pity!"

"I suppose you would like people to think that that was the style of subject on which you touched when you retired so mysteriously to the embrasure of the window, and talked for at least twenty minutes in a low tone?"

"I don't care a straw what people think. I hope he will remember the boots," said she, reflectively.

"He will scarcely forget any thing you told him," said Armand, with a slight tinge of sarcasm in his tone.

"I really hope not," said she, truthfully.

"But as those other intellectual gentlemen (I for-

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get their names) are still here, I suppose you'll manage to support existence until *he* returns?"

"What gentlemen? Oh yes, I know—poor fellows!" said Lèonie laughingly.

"Do you know," said he, implanting his walking stick deep in the moist ground, "I don't think you have a particle of a heart?"

"Oh yes I have."

"It must be made of stone, then."

"And why so, Monsieur le Duc, if you please?"

"Because you play with fire, and don't get burnt. In other words, you induce people to give you their hearts, while you do not bestow an atom of yours in return."

"A grave charge! But pray believe me when I say that I induce none to give me their hearts. I don't want hearts," said she of the brilliant eyes, "all I ask for is admiration."

"And you think there can exist such a thing in a man as intense admiration for a young and beautiful woman without an iota of any stronger feeling mixing itself up in it?"

"I admire, and have admired, many persons, and never have been troubled by the 'stronger feeling' you mention."

"Ah! then we go back to our starting point; that is, you have a heart of marble."

"What! because I see no great sin in a little harmless flirtation?"

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"Harmless to you, perhaps, but not to them. What! these hand pressures, these soft looks, these whispered conversations, you call these things harmless?"

"In what way are they not? To what do they lead?" she asked innocently. To her they meant nothing. She saw in them but the unceasing incense offered to the shrine of beauty. Perhaps she was not quite unaware of the danger; but does not that always give additional zest to the game? Besides, she was sure of herself. At least she thought so. As the enemy-environed general who, though he sees his men falling on every side, shuts his eyes to the evidence of ultimate defeat, and cries aloud that nought is lost whilst the citaded is safe! so with Lèonie.

Armand did not belie her when he spoke of gentle looks and whispered words. These she gave, but no more; these she bestowed in abundance, and to all; the general nature of her freedom being the very proof of her innocence.

"To what do they lead? To madness, I should think, if I were the recipient of favours in which, while you give, you disclaim all share."

"I never bestowed them on you, Duke," said she, casting her eyes down modestly.

Oh, how he loved her thus! It was the mood which became her most of all, perhaps because it was rarest with her. He admired her as, brilliant and

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dashing, she made herself the centre of attraction in a wondering crowd; he loved her when a burst of applause greeted one of her witty sallies; but he almost *revered* her as, with those flashing orbs subdued, she sat immobile, the very personification of womanly modesty and loveliness.

"No, you never did, and I thank you for it. I should not relish being one of many."

He one of many! he was *himself*—alone—a specimen of manly grace and nobleness, unique, unparalleled, in her eyes; but she knew how to school her glances better than he did, and while she felt his eyes were upon her, trying to read some sort of feeling in her face, she wisely kept on that downward gaze, which became her so well.

"I am very exacting, perhaps, and therefore you and I, I fear, could never agree," he continued. "I must be all or nothing to the woman I love. I could not, I repeat, be one of many."

"And what would you give the 'woman you love' in return for—for—"

"The sacrifice, you would say. She must not look upon it as such."

"I did not say sacrifice. What would you give her in return for choosing you to be all in all to her?"

"I should give her the true love of an untrammelled heart. I should place her upon a pedestal of love, at whose foot I'd lie in never-ceasing worship.

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I'd have no thought that was not hers—her life should glide on like a fairy dream—no clouds, but ever sunshine. When she smiled, then should all mankind be happy! When she sighed, then should the heavens weep! Where she tread, there should the flow'rets spring, and when she died, chaos should come again!"

He had risen from his seat when he commenced to speak, and flung himself on the green sward; as he finished this exaggerated lover's picture, Lèonie found he was bending on his knees before her. She looked around with a startled glance, and then said:

"Rise! oh, rise, Duke, I beg."

"Not until you have spoken one word to me. You know too well who it is I would worship thus. You have known it ever since that day on which your eyes gazed up into mine with a glance that electrified my whole being. Lèonie, I love you! My own, my brilliant Lèonie, can I be all to you?"

He was still on both knees before her, and as he finished this passionate appeal he put his hands on her slender waist, and pressed it so violently as almost to cause her pain.

"Lèonie, dearest, *dearest* one! Do not be coy—tell me at once—Will you, *can* you love me?"

She raised her beautiful eyes to meet his eager look; he saw truth imprinted there as she said softly, "I do love you, Armand."

He almost lifted her from the seat as he strained

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her to his breast, and covered her sweet face with fervent kisses.

"Oh, my Lèonie! I have dreamed in my solitary moments of a love pure and unselfish, an all-absorbing, tender, passionate feeling, to be the ruler of my every action, prompting me to render to some dear being such devotion, such entire affection, as would make her existence blissful as life may be. I have hoped that my worship, my adoration, would be understood, be appreciated—that when the moment came for me to give my whole heart, to abjure for another all thought of self, that the choice might be a worthy one. I have felt that to die ere such a being had crossed my path, were indeed to have lived in vain. Often when the camp fire burnt low, and the sad wind sighed out a melancholy song, I've sat alone and wondered when I should meet her. And when, in battle's frenzy, I've rushed on, perhaps to death, I've sighed to think that if I fell *her* loving tears would ne'er be shed, her gentle heart would never bleed for me. But it is for this I have lived! For such love as this, heat, cold, hunger, thirst, cannon ball, sabre, all, all have spared me! You love me Lèonie; my dream is realized. I now know what happiness is. Say it once more, my loved one! Let me again drink in that sound."

"I love you truly, dearest."

"Then you will be mine, my own? Mine,—those cheeks in their rosy bloom, those eyes into whose

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lovely depths I have so often gazed, and tried to read what was passing there—they are mine—all mine!"

She could not resist him in his first outburst of love; again and again, in spite of her efforts at escape, he kissed those rosy lips, and declared he was not worthy of the priceless boon of her love. And so they sat, till the sun mounting high in the heavens warned them it was time to depart. They rose and walked slowly back to the chateau.

Oh, those lovers' walks! when the two souls beat in unison, when all nature looks bright, when the birds sing, the air is sweet and fresh; when the tongues are talking trivial things, perhaps, but the true hearts are singing ever, ever, sweet tales of love and happiness. And so they reached the chateau.

The Marquis de Claremont Brezè had arrived; Madame de Neris had not appeared; beyond this nothing had changed since their departure in the early morning. Nothing, except that her heart beat high with love and joy, and that Armand's was bursting with tenderness and affection.

When Lèonie entered her room she found a package upon the table, which had arrived at noon from Paris. She thought it was one of the many orders she had given Monsieur Lebète. She was mistaken. On opening it she found it to be the diamond necklace which she had so much desired, and of which she had spoken the night she won and lost at cards. There was no letter, or even card, with

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it, but she knew well who the donor was, and kissed the bauble for his loved sake. She put it on when she dressed for dinner, and as she stood before her glass, clad in a delicate silk, trimmed with cloud-like fleecy folds of soft white lace, the diamonds throwing back in a thousand different hues the strange brilliancy of her eyes, she could not help thinking she was worthy his choice, even had he been ten times a Duke. It was with a fluttering of the heart, till then unknown to her, that she entered the drawing room before dinner. How would he treat her? Was their engagement a thing to be hidden, or would he lay it bare to all the world? She was not long in doubt, for the moment she appeared Armand left the window, where he was standing, to sit near her. He paid no attention to the *convenances* which, perhaps, whispered that he, as guest of the highest rank, should lead the Countess in to dinner. He stayed quietly near Lèonie till the Marquis came forward and led away the hostess. Armand then offered his arm to the young widow, nor did he leave her side till she retired for the night. Then he took her hand and said softly, very softly, "Good night, my Lèonie—my wife!"

That evening the Count and Countess de Frissac announced the engagement of marriage between their daughter and the Marquis. This was unexpected, but all offered their sincere congratulations. All? All, save one—Sydney Mortimer.

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As Lèonie sat alone in her room that night, turning over in her white hands the magnificent present Armand had sent her, she recalled with pleasure all his attentions to her during and after dinner. He seemed as proud of her as she could possibly be of him; he gazed at her with admiration, which he took little pains to conceal. But in spite of this she could not help thinking with regret of that passionate scene in the park. Though he had asked her to be his wife, and she had said she would be, was it not wrong to allow him to kiss her, and to press her waist? In all her love scenes she had never permitted any thing like this. But then she loved him; yes! deeply, truly—loved as she had never loved before, and she was now his affianced bride. In spite of this reasoning the little general sighed as she thought how completely all her outposts had fallen before the enemy's fire. "But after all," said she, as she closed her pretty eyes, "there's no harm done so long as the citadel is safe."

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## CHAPTER IX.

### SYDNEY'S CONGRATULATIONS.

HORTENSE had not courage enough to appear in the drawing room the evening her engagement was to be announced. But this was her last act of weakness. She reproached herself for having given way to it, "for where," she said, "is the virtue of consenting to the match when I do not even steel myself to the first meaningless ceremonies." So she determined that she would play the coward no more, and, to the Countess's pleased surprise, one morning asked, with great seeming interest, when the contract was to be signed, and when the final ceremony performed.

It was the express desire of the Marquis that there should be no unnecessary delay; though the engagement was of recent date, the two families were well acquainted, and therefore a fortnight from the day of the arrival of the bridegroom elect was fixed for the signing of the contract. This ceremony was to take place at Chateau Frissac, and a week afterwards the family and guests were to proceed to Paris to take part in the double marriage, first at the *Mairie* and then at



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the Church. The Marquis and his wife were then to go to Italy for the bridal tour, and this was the signal for the guests of the chateau to disperse. These plans were submitted to Hortense for approval. She gave it instantly.

"I fear you consider a fortnight too short a time," said her father.

"No, father; the sooner the better."

"Good child," said the Count, as he kissed her white forehead.

But to one thing she would not consent, she would have no unnecessary intimacy with her future husband. She had never spoken one word to him in private, and she would not do so. He must leave her free and undisputed mistress of all her time, "till I am married, mother, and then he may dispose of me as he pleases." And so she never left her mother's side; they walked together and they drove together. Occasionally Hortense rode horseback with Lèonie and Armand, but if the Marquis spoke of joining their party she always pleaded a sudden headache, and did not go.

It may be thought strange that the Marquis was willing to take such a wife, to wed thus the hand and not the heart; but, in truth, it mattered little to him; he was past the age of romantic attachments himself, and therefore did not expect them in others. He married because he found in Hortense a person who would do honour to his name. She would be pro-

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sented at court, where she would shine, she would sit at the head of a table, saying little, perhaps, but looking the very personification of her noble name—she would drive out in their grand coach, whose armorialed panels bore the device "*les plus fiers*," and the world would say that of *her* they had indeed good reason to be proud. And so Hortense, during those two weeks, was not much troubled by the attention of her future spouse.

One morning as the young girl was walking with her mother in the garden, they met Monsieur Morlot. The Countess stopped to speak to him, and Hortense walked slowly along, and reflected on what might have been her fate, if the young Englishman had loved her, and had cared to woo and win her. Did he not love her? Whether he did or not it mattered little now; better that he did not, for, in a few days, it would be treason even to think of him. She turned leisurely into one of the bye-paths, and there stood the object of her thoughts.

Sydney Mortimer lifted his hat in salutation as she passed slowly on, but in a moment he was by her side again.

"Mademoiselle," said he, "I fear I must have appeared very rude in not offering my congratulations on your approaching marriage. It was a great oversight on my part, but I hope you will excuse it, and now accept my sincerest felicitations on the happy event."

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She raised her eyes to his face. Why should *he* taunt her thus? Did he not feel? Could he not understand that she was no willing bride? That congratulation and felicitation were on the part of others distasteful to her, that from him they were odious, made her miserably unhappy? She looked at him again; he was gazing at her with such feeling depicted in those clear eyes of his, as made her heart beat faster, and the hot blood kindle into her cheek. He turned his gaze away as her glance met his, with such a look of pain, of sincere grief, that it convinced her at once that she was dear to him. As the conviction entered her mind it seemed to her her heart would break: with a stifled sob she turned away—the affianced bride of the Marquis could not encourage a feeling which was sinful. As the promised wife of another she must not regret that love which she felt was but too truly returned. Poor child, she was young, too young, alas! to suffer thus. But mixed with this pain was a strange feeling of exultation. He loved her! She had not given her heart to one indifferent to her; strange creatures that we are, though that love was the source of such unhappiness, of such misery, she felt that 'twere death to part with it.

Sydney read none of these thoughts, though they were plainly enough written upon the clear young visage; he dared not trust himself to look into those beautiful eyes. She was another's, he must not think

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of her—'twere disloyal, and Sydney, though he ardently loved her, was a gentleman, as incapable of robbing another man of his promised bride, as of his purse; so he turned sadly away, and Hortense remained alone. He had not even pressed her hand, but she knew, her heart told her, she was beloved by the man who had left her so abruptly, and thus, with all her pain at the discovery, was mixed a feeling almost of bliss.

The Countess now joined Hortense. The young girl's mother was evidently much moved, preoccupied, no doubt, by something that had been imparted to her by Monsieur Morlot, and therefore did not notice the agitation of her daughter. As for Sydney, he strode on into the depths of the park. He was excited and unhappy, and, as he wandered about, his reflections upon *mariages de convenance* were indeed bitter. "It was evident," he said, "that Hortense was marrying this man, not for the sake of his title and wealth, but to gratify the pride of her parents." Oh! what a barbarous custom which thus sacrifices the lamb to the wolf. What worse than murder is this forced living death? Sydney's heart rose with anger—he could almost have cursed those parents, who would thus sell their child; and he, what was he to do? Stand by and see Hortense, the being he loved, so sacrificed. No! he could not do that. At one moment he was tempted to try, even at this eleventh hour, to win her love, and thus cause her to break off

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the hated engagement. But then, thought he, would she, in after years, thank him for having made her the wife of a plain English country gentleman, when she might have been the bride of the most noble the Marquis de Claremont Brezè. No! besides, honour whispered that her word was given, and that he must not, even by a single look, try to cause her to retract her solemn promise. One course alone was left him—he must leave the chateau that very day; he would not even trust himself to look again at her in her calm pallid loveliness. He would announce his intention of leaving to La Rocheconstant, leaving the Duke to frame some apology to the host for Sydney's departure.

He found Armand in his room, stretched on a couch, reading a book, but with his left hand tightly clutched over a very diminutive riding glove, which, from time to time, he raised to his lips.

"Come in my dear fellow," said the Duke, "I hadn't courage to dress myself before dinner, else I was thinking seriously of going to find you. I've got something to tell you."

Sydney said that he also had something to communicate.

"Let me make my confidence first," said Armand, and here he held up the glove with a happy smile.

"Well," said Sydney.

"Do you know who it belongs to?"

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Mortimer said laughingly he could guess.

"But—but it belongs to me, Mortimer, as well as the dear hand that wore it."

"What, you are married already?" said Sydney, rather astonished.

"Not yet, but soon will be: she has said yes. God bless her," said Armand.

"My dear boy," and Sydney rose and shook his friend's hand cordially, "I wish you joy, upon my word I do. The lady is worthy such a good fellow as you are, and you know all along I told you she loved you."

"Yes, but I never could believe it, on account of her flirting so confoundedly with those three shallow-pated danglers after her. But, thank heaven, that's all over—she's mine for good and all now"—here he again pressed the glove to his lips.

"You must not think any thing of a woman's flirting, they mean no harm by it, at least I am sure she did not: but when is the marriage to take place?"

"Soon, I hope, but I leave that to her. We shan't be rich you know, more's the pity. I'd like to give her a home fit for an Empress, but I have only something like 1,200 a year of your English pounds."

"And the lady," asked Sydney.

"The lady, why she has untold treasure of affection, but as for pelf, but little I dare say; 'twere rank injustice to the rest of mankind were *all* the earth's

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treasures showered into her lap. Am I not a lucky fellow to have won her? I regret I should but have so miserable a pittance to offer her. But come, now you know all, let's hear what you have to say."

"I am going away, La Rocheconstant, and you must make my excuses to our friends here."

"Going away! When?"

"To-morrow."

"What for?"

Sydney had received so much of Armand's confidence that he thought it was but fair to tell the Duke all. And now the full heart overflowed with the story of his love. How dear a thing seems to us when about to lose it. Armand sympathized deeply with the young Englishman's sorrow. But he begged Sydney to remain, at least for the signing of the contract. He might plead business, or any other cause as an excuse for his not being present at the wedding, but the Count and Countess, he said, would feel hurt at his leaving before the other ceremony.

To Sydney it seemed mockery, this affixing his signature to the marriage contract of the girl he loved. It was a mark of approval, of approbation to the act, and heaven knows Sydney reflected on it with few of those feelings. At last he was persuaded by Armand into remaining. Often after this he thought of the Duke's reasoning, and was thankful he had accepted it.

In looking back over the events of years, how

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often does it seem as if one trivial act was the pivot on which all subsequent events turned. How often do we exclaim, "How different would my life have been had I not done such and such a thing, at the period, seemingly so trivial, and yet so fraught with importance, and so bearing upon the future." Armand urged Sydney to remain, and Mortimer promised he would; he saw that the Duke earnestly desired it, and, after all, said to himself, "let me look at her for a few days longer, even did I leave this instant, my youth is forever saddened, my affection forever blighted."

Another promise had been made that morning, it was Monsieur Morlot who had exacted it from the Countess, during the short interview he had with her in the garden. She had stopped to ask him if he had taken any steps towards reclaiming her lost one, to ask if he still had any hope of so doing. Oh yes, he was full of hope, he said, although as yet he had made little progress.

"You know he still believes that woman loves him, and he is counting the days till he can get away from his duties here. She wrote him a long letter the other day, saying that she was so sad in his absence. I suspect it was to remind him of what he had promised to give her; *he* thinks otherwise. Luckily the *trousseau* having to be bought, and some other payments to be made at the time, have prevented his committing this act of folly as yet."



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"Did he answer this woman's letter?"

"He did, saying, however, that family reasons would prevent his being in Paris before another week."

"He will leave his daughter's side after such a solemn ceremony to go to that creature?"

"He will not, Countess, if my plans succeed."

"And when do you put them into operation?"

"They are already in train. There is a man in Paris of whom the Count is jealous. There is no doubt that good reason exists for his being so. Your husband will not believe so. This morning I proposed to him to go up to Paris to-morrow and stop a day or two. This woman not expecting him will be no doubt with the favoured lover. The Count's eyes will be opened, Madame, and his folly cured."

Morlot's tone, though breathing hope to the poor wife, was far from being gay. He sighed as she took his hand, and said that to him she would owe her future happiness.

"And now to aid me as much as you can in this plan you must lay aside these quaker-like costumes, these sad colours. You must be gay, cheerful, and richly dressed. There is something attractive to a man (at least to one of the Count's taste) in handsome apparel. It is the beautiful setting to the brilliant jewel. Do you promise?"

"Oh, yes, gladly," said she.

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"Then *au revoir*."

"Shall I not see you again?"

"Not till after our return; we shall not stay more than a day or two. There are yet five days before the signing of the contract."

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## CHAPTER X.

### MADEMOISELLE X. OF THE COMEDIE FRANÇAISE.

MADEMOISELLE X. of the Comedie Française is a charming woman, with beautiful expressive eyes, and a look of quiet womanly goodness, which gives her acting of the parts which usually fall to her lot—the virtuous misused wives, the ingenuous young ladies, the pure, unselfish, kind, good young women in all phases of their varied careers—a most effective character. No one gazing at her as she comes forward dutifully to receive a father's blessing, or shyly to receive a lover's first chaste embrace, doubts for a moment that she is all she represents; that open countenance cannot belie itself; oh, no, she is what she seems. And yet, somehow, the Parisians, those wicked sarcastic Parisians, say she has *le diable au corps*. Poor misjudged Mademoiselle X., and bad scandalous Parisians! Why, we have seen her (on the stage) give to a poor woman the twenty sous which were to procure her that coveted rosebush. We have seen her (on the stage) sacrifice her love, her dearest feelings, to save the honour of her father, and

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we have wept as pale and heart-broken she gave to a miserable dirty old man—whom we hated intensely—that hand which was promised to the young man who loved her. He was our favourite, was so good-looking, so much in love, and wore such tight boots. A thousand good and noble actions have we seen her perform (on the stage). And yet those wicked Parisians dared to say that her father is a coachman, and that the Concierge at No. — Rue Coquenard is her mother! Fie, for shame! How scandalous the world is. The Count de Frissac shared our feelings on this subject. He believed that Mademoiselle X. was all and more than she seemed, and above all he was sure she loved him devotedly. Why, she had told him so a thousand times! On one occasion when he liquidated some very large debts of hers she assured him of her love until utter fatigue or entire conviction must have ensued.

Now Morlot had professed to doubt this love; he had even said that a young man of whom the Count (needlessly he assured himself) was somewhat jealous, ranked higher in her good graces than Monsieur de Frissac did. Merely to satisfy Morlot of his blunder the Count was about to prove to his friend that Mademoiselle X. loved but himself. They were to call upon her, dine with her, and then announce their intention of returning to the chateau that very evening. She would, the Count knew, accompany them to the railway terminus and see them off. Morlot and

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the Count had agreed to stop at the first station and return by the up train, which would bring them back to Paris just one hour from the time they had left it.

If truth must be told, this plan originated with Morlot. The Count was by far too secure of Mademoiselle X.'s good faith and constancy to have bethought him of such a scheme. This man, who, for a being utterly beneath her, betrayed his loving and most loveable Countess, felt sure in the full strength of his pride and egotism that no one would desire to betray *him*.

They did as had been planned, dined with Mademoiselle X. She accompanied them to the terminus, and saw them off—not without uttering reproaches and bitter regrets that her Count was thus forsaking her so soon. He had questioned her about the young man, Baron Berkloff, and she had indignantly, one might almost say with virtuous and affectionate horror, denied all foundation for the Count's fear. She had treated his apparent jealousy as a wrong done to himself. How could he suppose that Baron Berkloff, or any other man, could make her forget what was due to *him*?

As she thus refuted the Count's suspicions she looked so beautiful, so sincere, that M. de Frissac felt he had been unjust, and inwardly abused Morlot for having urged him to accuse her. In fact, the Count was determined he would not come back to Paris that

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night; he would speed on to the chateau, secure in the affections of his Mademoiselle X. But Morlot overruled this resolution, and back they came. Mademoiselle X. was, they knew, to play that, night, and so they had ample time to gain over the *concierge* of the house where she dwelt, as well as to school her valet in the part he was to perform. This worthy domestic was to introduce them into his mistress's boudoir close to the salon, and hidden behind the rich hangings of the window they would see and overhear her when she returned home. The Count felt annoyed at all this spying, but the valet had admitted, after much pressing, and the receipt of several louis, that Baron Berkloff had been several times lately a visitor of Mademoiselle's. Now as she had averred exactly the reverse, the Count felt he should like to be more certain of the fact, and thus—but not without many exclamations of annoyance—he ensconsed himself, with Morlot, in the boudoir. A ring, and Mademoiselle entered, flushed, and in the gayest mood.

"Did any one come?" she asked mechanically of the valet. She knew no one could have come—the Count had gone.

"No, Mademoiselle," said the valet.

It should be here stated that Mademoiselle was not alone when she came in, several of her young female friends, and two or three gentlemen, Baron Berkloff among the number, accompanied her. They

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all went into the dining-room, and during the ensuing hour the Count had the pleasure of listening to the clear, ringing laughter of his charmer. He could not overhear their conversation, but that it was gay was evident. The repast finished she arose and preceded her guests into the drawing-room. It was brilliantly illuminated, and cards being placed upon the table they were all soon deeply engaged in the excitement of *Baccarat.* For two hours or more this lasted, during which time the Count endured the mortification of hearing himself referred to in terms the reverse of complimentary, and none were more cutting than Mademoiselle X. Fifty times he was on the point of rushing out and shaming her deceit, as he termed it, but pride kept him back. At last the players became wearied, they rose from the game, and as preparations were made for departure it seemed that all of them had determined to say something bitter or sarcastic touching the Count. Poor man, he bore it badly. He cursed himself for his folly and vowed vengeance.

All went save Berkloff.

"Your bear is gone, is he not?" he inquired of Mademoiselle X.

"Oh yes, I had the pleasure of seeing him off," she replied.

"Then," said he, ringing the bell, "I shall tell your valet to send away my carriage."

She made no reply. She was speechless! The Count, pale and with long suppressed rage, stood be-

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fore her. She knew at once that he was no longer her dupe.

The Baron was a man of the world. He had, he knew, referred offensively to the Count de Frissac, and he saw something in the new comer's eye which warned him that a reparation would be demanded. He bowed to the Count and stood waiting for that gentleman to address him. But the Count could not speak, he was enraged beyond measure; he would certainly revenge himself, but for the moment he could but gaze regretfully at Mademoiselle X. Why had she so bitterly destroyed his last illusion?

The Baron became weary of the pause; he addressed the Count, said he knew he had given cause for offence, and that he was at his orders.

"Very well, sir," said the Count, impatiently.

The Baron handed his card to Morlot, bowed, and withdrew.

The Count said many bitter things to Mademoiselle X., and then himself and Morlot left her to her remorse; not for her treatment of the Count. Oh, no! She regretted she had mortally offended him *so soon*. A few days later when the furniture and horses were in her possession the Count's discovery would have made her laugh; now it made her cry. All were not so generous as he.

To the Count's assertions that he would revenge himself upon the Baron, Morlot turned a deaf ear. At last he silenced his friend by saying: "Count, you

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cannot fight a duel. You cannot risk your life for this woman. You owe to your wife, to your daughter a duty which forbids your doing that which would bring upon them shame and unhappiness. Would you have the Countess, so good, so loving, so worthy of your esteem, know that for such a creature as Mademoiselle X., you had neglected *her?* Would you have your daughter feel that you were unworthy her affection? You cannot fight this duel. All Paris would hear of it, and all Paris would know the cause. This woman would be the first to relate the circumstances which have occurred to-night, could she thus revenge herself. Be guided by me—promise you will not fight."

Reluctantly, for bitterly was his amour propre wounded, the Count renounced his idea of demanding satisfaction of the Baron. He felt that Morlot was right. His wife, his danghter, must not hear of this adventure. He must not dishonour the name of de Frissac at a moment when his only child was about to unite herself to one of the most ancient and most noble titles in France. These, and other reasons, all based upon pride, urged him to renounce calling out the Baron. Alas for the Countess! Not one thought of love for her actuated the Count! He had become too much accustomed to his indifference for her to throw it off at a moment's notice. Well did Morlot know this, when he urged upon the Count the duty he owed to his wife. He went back the next day

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with de Frissac to the chateau; and while in the train, Morlot reflected with complacency upon his triumph. He was keeping his word with the Countess: she would be grateful, friendly. He hoped he would succeed in changing that friendliness into a deeper feeling ere long; this hope strengthened when he saw how truly grateful she was, on his assuring her soon after that for the future Mademoiselle X., of the *Comedie Française*, possessed no attractions for her husband.

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## CHAPTER XI.

### A SUSPICION AND A PAINFUL ANNOUNCEMENT.

It required but one look at Morlot's countenance for the Countess to divine that his journey had been crowned with, at least, partial success. His joyous air she could attribute to no other cause. She longed to escape for a moment from her guests and seek the few words with him, which would confirm or annihilate her hopes. The Count, although he was now constantly engaged, receiving the visits of lawyers who had come to arrange the marriage settlement, had, when free to play the host, lost that air of *bonhomie* for which he was once so distinguished. None sat so well upon him; and more than once it was noticed among the gay sojourners at the chateau, that M. de Frissac was not quite himself. Some attributed it to the anxiety attendant upon the approaching marriage of his only child; others (these were the gentlemen) feared that heavy losses at play had something to do with his troubled look. To the Countess these outward signs of an unsettled mind

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were received with joy. Now, she could not doubt he had suffered some cruel disappointment in regard to the woman who had exerted so fatal an influence over him; and the wife hoped that his eyes, once opened to the infidelity and utter worthlessness of creatures of her class, could not fail to have a beneficial effect upon him. Morlot had assured her that, could the Count once be weaned from this woman, so far from ever seeking to renew intimacy with her like, he would return with pleasure to those home affections which possessed every charm, except the happiness resulting from a father's love. This the Countess hardly dared hope: not yet at least. The wound was yet too recent, she feared, to be thus quickly healed. Perhaps, in time, when no recollection of that false woman remained, except one of contempt for her perfidy, then, and then only could she hope to charm his love into the legitimate channel. It so happened that two days elapsed after their return from Paris, before Madame de Frissac had an opportunity for a few moments' private communication with Morlot. Forty-eight hours! and, as in the case with all expectant people, they seemed five times longer than ever forty-eight hours had appeared before. From Morlot's "Nods and becks and wreathed smiles," the Countess was convinced that the revelation would be satisfactory, at least in the main point. But what were the particulars of this singular affair? Had he, thought disclaiming all future *relations*, made good

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his promise relative to the furnishing of a new suite of apartments for this woman. Had he, in fact, though angered, given her the three hundred thousand francs, or its equivalent? She had known her husband, in discharging a servant for evident misconduct, though refusing to give him a character, pay him a year's wages. Had the same reckless generosity marked his conduct in this case? She feared so. Yes, feared; for, though she was the Lady Bountiful of the village, though half her income went in charities, she could not think of this large sum being so shamefully misapplied without shuddering. The Count had directed her to spare no expense in the selection of the articles to compose Hortense's *trousseau;* nor was it fit the daughter of one noble line, and bride-elect of the representative of another, should be stinted. Already portions of this magnificent outfit had arrived, and were laid out for exhibition to the guests, in one of the large receiving rooms.

The Countess, according to her usual custom, was to pay for the *trousseau* immediately on its delivery, and she feared that if the Count had taken this sum, together with its being a bad year for crops, tenants in arrears, and Hortense's dowry to procure, the year's income would be much reduced. All these doubts and fears were at last set at rest, by the coveted conversation with Morlot. Each day, since his return, had he visited her in her boudoir, and each time had she been surrounded by her guests;

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and thus private conversation was impossible. But to-day she was alone; literally alone. Even Hortense seemed to be longer than usual at her *toilette* for she had not yet made her appearance. As Morlot entered, Madame de Frissac rose, with an exclamation of pleasure, to receive him, saying at the same time how much she had desired to speak with him.

Morlot at once related the nature of the affair; quieting her doubts in regard to the money. He had prevented that; nay, to do the Count justice, he himself had shown no desire to be generous, after the discovery of the woman's perfidy.

"And so he said he despised her?" asked the Countess, eagerly.

"That he despised her, and that he had been a fool, an idiot, to seek happiness away from his own home—that he was now completely cured."

Madame de Frissac seemed so overcome with pleasure at this speech, that Morlot spared her the recital of the Count's bitter, bitter regrets at finding himself so deceived. Again and again she made him repeat her husband's abjuration of this woman, and all her class.

"My friend," said she, for the first time in her life addressing Morlot thus familiarly, "by this one kind act of yours, you have taken away from my heart nearly twenty years of sorrow."

Morlot told her again that now there could be little doubt that her husband, released from the per-

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nicious influence, the impure atmosphere which once surrounded him, would turn joyfully to his wife for consolation. And, indeed, it seemed but natural that this should happen. The Countess's eyes filled with tears of joy, while Morlot's shone with a dull and heavy expression.

"And, now, I must send you away, for my friends and my child will be coming, and it is not meet we should be seen together."

"Your friends—your child—and your *husband*," he said, almost savagely.

She looked at him with an astonished air. He had now neared the door, and turning abruptly, said, in a hoarse whisper,—"That which has assured your happiness has annihilated mine."

Before she could answer, he had disappeared behind the silken *portierès*, and was gone. She could hardly believe she heard aright, as his parting speech struck upon her ear. "That which had assured her happiness had annihilated *his*." In what way could one influence the other? A horrible and unjust suspicion flashed upon her mind. Would the Count's absence from those places close the doors to his less-important friend? No! it could not be any thing of that sort; she was sure she wronged him. Else what could have been his motive in operating this happy change in the Count? For that she was grateful, very grateful; but his strange manner, and still stranger words, made her resolve to hold no

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private intercourse with Morlot in future. And yet would that be a just return for his kindness? What would he think of her smiling and encouraging, till the work was done, and then suddenly becoming severe and distant? He would despise her. Well, better that than that strange wildly tender look which he turned on her before he left the room. After all, he must know that the words he had uttered were sufficient to cause a truly discreet and modest woman to retire her friendship. "Yes, come what may, I'll see him no more in private."

Morlot was surprised and vexed at his own imprudence. Every thing had passed as he supposed it would; the Countess had thanked him, and called him her friend; but it was her blush of joy, when her husband's love was promised her, her entire forgetfulness of past wrongs in presence of this belief in future affection, which caused Morlot to forget himself. "But," he said to himself, "the first blow is struck—I shall soon know my fate."

A servant entering the Countess's boudoir, announced the arrival of several boxes containing the remainder of Mademoiselle's *trousseau.*

"Bring them in here, Justin," said the Countess. By this time Lèonie, Hortense, and all the lady guests had assembled in the boudoir; the usual place of rendezvous in the morning. They all helped to unpack the rich things, while the Countess and Hor-



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tense, assisted by a femme de chambre, laid them tastefully on the tables and consols.

"Oh, what an exquisite dressing gown," said Lèonie, holding up a robe of light blue cashmere, elaborately embroidered.

"Are not these handkerchiefs beautiful, Hortense?" said Helen de Chambellas, showing them to the owner; "and the Marquis's coronet—how that sets them off! What a lucky girl you are, Hortense!" added she with a sigh.

Hortense certainly did not seem very grateful for her luck, as Helen called it, but took the handkerchiefs quietly and laid them on a consol, without even casting her eyes on the Marquis's coronet.

"And here is the wedding dress!"

"Oh, how beautiful!" was the exclamation of all the ladies. Brussels flounces over white silk, looped up with orange blossoms.

"Just what I should have chosen for myself," said little Madame Lèonie.

And now every thing was laid out in the most tasteful manner; all the paraphernalia which makes that costly thing called a *trousseau.*

"A note for Madame Ligault," and Justin held forth to her a silver salver, on which was a small three-cornered note.

She saw directly it was from *him;* there were only a few words, they were these:

"Dearest,—can you come into the garden di-

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rectly—I have something of importance to say to you.

"Your loving Armand."

The servant had asked her if there was any answer, but she left the room directly she saw the contents of this epistle. What could it be? Her light form almost flew down the stairs, and at the foot of them she saw her lover. He was waiting for her; she thought his note was of no great importance, merely written to obtain an interview; she felt as wild and frolicsome as a young kitten, and it is believed, though history is undecided on the point, that she jumped down the three bottom steps and was caught in the Duke's arms. If, instead of walking down soberly as a little lady of six-and-twenty should, she had committed this great dereliction, it must have been a matter of sincere self-congratulation to Lèonie that Madame de Neris never became cognizant of the fact. If she had, the good fat lady would have shaken her pudding curls, and been forced to own that there was more guilt than giddiness in it. Armand took Lèonie's arm under his, and walked straight away to the end of the garden, never saying a word, but patting all the while that little white hand which lay all ungloved upon his black sleeve. They found some garden chairs there, and as she sat down in one of them, he kissed the hand he had been fondling. There was some constraint about his manner, but she wisely said nothing, waiting for him to speak. He made

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several ineffectual efforts; poor fellow, he seemed to be troubled with a sudden attack of sore throat, as though he had great difficulty in swallowing.

"Lèonie," he said, and then he stopped; that dreadful trouble in the throat! But at last it came. "Lèonie, I have brought you here to tell you that I release you from the promise which bound you to me."

She could not answer for a few seconds—this announcement took away her breath. It must then have been a presentiment of coming evil which made her reproach herself so often for that scene in the park. All the outposts gone, nothing but the citadel left, and here was he giving up the siege, here was he releasing her from her promise—that is, he releasing himself from *his* promise to marry her. It was her turn to gasp now. She could hardly articulate.

"Armand, what do you mean; what is the cause of this?"

She was spiteful at first, and thought it some woman's intrigue, but when she looked into his eyes, and saw sorrow and deep love both written there, she could be strong minded no longer; her pride forsook her, and she burst into tears. What a powerful effect upon the lover have the beloved one's tears! This was the first time Armand had seen Lèonie weep; he put his arm round her, and began caressing her like a child, and called himself a great rough brute, to have so jostled his fair flower.

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"Don't cry, my own love, don't, you will break my heart." But she would have no coaxing, she quickly dried her eyes, and asked him again what he meant.

"This is it, Lèonie: I have, by this morning's post, received a letter from my mother. My sister is engaged to be married; the day is not yet fixed, indeed it may be several months yet; the gentleman has been sent off on a distant diplomatic mission, which may be of long or short duration. They have long been attached to each other, and my sister would willingly have married and accompanied him, but the climate of the country where he is going is one to which it would have been imprudent to take her. This match is one in every way worthy of her. The gentleman is a nobleman of the old regime, and has a fine fortune wherewith to keep up his rank. My sister bearing the name she does, cannot go to her husband portionless. My mother's pride, my own, our honour, would not allow it. I have told you, dearest, that of an estate partially confiscated by revolution, changes of dynasty, &c., added to my own wretched extravagance in early youth, but little now remains. Of this my mother and sister have half, I the other moiety. Her portion is not too much for my mother, therefore, Lèonie, when my sister marries, I shall give up to her what *I* now have. Her dowry shall be the estate I possess in the south of France, which gives an annuity of thirty thousand francs."

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"Well, Armand."

"Well, Lèonie, that is the plain truth of the case. With my profession, I have no need of money. But you, dearest, is it not fair that I should offer to release you from your vows, made under different circumstances? You, bright and dashing as you are, could never support poverty; you were not born to do so."

"Ah, Armand," said she in a reproachful tone, "how can you be so cruel? And do you believe that I said I would be your wife only because I thought of your fortune and your rank; fie, for shame." The loving little woman's eyes were full of tears. "Oh, Armand," repeated she, "do you not know that I have felt poverty, that greatest, most bitter poverty—the want of affection—of love? Am I, once so poor, so friendless, but now so rich in your love, to lose that treasure, to give up my all? You will think me unwomanly I fear, will feel too much your power, will despise your poor little friend who tells you how dear you are to her, who forgets her woman's rôle to cling to the man who offers to give her back her troth, when she should steel her heart against him; but oh, Armand, I have been so poor, so very poor, dearest, have had so little of love, for Heaven denied me even that of my parents, that I cannot give up yours; why, Armand, your love is all to me, more than all the treasures of earth could buy from me, more than all the world could repay me for."

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Poor, dear, vehement little Lèonie. Here her woman's heart broke down, and hiding her face on her lover's shoulder, she sobbed as though it would break. In unspeakable bliss, the Duke pressed her to his heart. He kissed, he called her those pet names she delighted in, and, I must add, that, spite of his manhood, hers were not the only tears shed, for Armand, though brave as a lion, was soft hearted as a woman. Lèonie soon felt that his affection was all hers, and that duty alone had counselled his actions. He was so proud of her affection, so happy to see how much she loved him, that all her gaiety returned. Her sunny temper broke through the late storm, and without an effort she resumed her vivacity. An occasional heave of the now relieved bosom, and tear drops still clinging to her long dark eyelashes, were the last traces of her anguish.

"I not support poverty? Let me tell you, Sir, that I have supported poverty. At my uncle's house, our meals were indeed frugal, brown bread and beet salad." Armand said that *was* frugal. "I can't say I enjoyed it, but that was because I did not love my uncle, but you, Armand, you know I love you. You shall see what a thrifty little housekeeper I shall be. Give you up because you have got no money! we don't want it, dearest, we'll leave that to the grand people who don't love each other. Why, what a heartless creature you must have thought me. Not marry you indeed. Oh, Armand!"

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This desultory speech seemed entirely satisfactory, for again did he seize the little hand that was being so energetically flourished about, and again and again did he cover it with kisses.

"I shall try to get some position that a gentleman can accept; that won't bedifficult in Paris, there are railways, and banks, and *administrations* of all sorts, you know. It will go hard indeed if I can't get to be *Directeur General* and Rogue in particular of something." She smiled and pressed his hand. "And then I've not yet given up my grade in the army." Here she stopped him. He had told her he would do so, and had already promised his uniform to a lieutenant in the same regiment—a man who had been a peasant boy on the Duke's estate, had drawn an unlucky number in the conscription, and had managed to rise from the ranks to a lieutenancy during the Crimean and Italian campaigns. The Duke was a captain, and the uniform was to be formally given to Pierre, who was daily expecting his promotion.

"Never speak to me about the army again," said Lèonie with an attempt at great severity.

"Well, dearest, then it shall be the directorship of the railways or something of that sort; it will put off our marriage I don't know how long," said he, in a melancholy tone.

"I can bear that, Armand, as long as you talk no more nonsense about freeing me from my vows. I

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am sure I shall come out wonderfully as a housekeeper."

"My own dear clever little wife, so you love me well enough to share my poverty. You, so handsome, so brilliant, so fond of admiration."

"Of none but yours now, Armand; you must forget my past giddiness."

The important interview was now over, and they returned to the house. She stood on the door-steps, and he shook her hands valiantly.

"Oh, Armand," said she, sorrowfully, "think of you spending all that money for those diamonds!" He said she was a little miser, and that if she stood there any longer he should embrace her, although the old head-gardener was gazing at them. She shook her finger at him, in token of mild (*very* mild Madame de Neris would have said) reproach, and then went her way to her room.

There was one large dark corridor to be crossed ere she could get to it, and she ran along, singing and chirping like a happy bird; as she did so, she came suddenly into violent collision with a person who was hastily walking up and down the corridor. She might have fainted away had Armand been there to catch her, for she was frightened, and gave a terrified little shriek; she soon recovered, however, and saw that the cause of her agitation was M. Morlot. Neither the concussion nor the shriek had produced any effect upon him, and he stalked by the widow without even



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so much as begging pardon; so wrapt was he in his thoughts.

"I shall certainly speak to cousin de Frissac," said she, as she turned the key in her door. "I believe that man is mad."

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## CHAPTER XII.

### THE SIGNING OF THE CONTRACT.

THE all-important moment had arrived, the evening named for the signing of the contract. The grand *salon* had been tastefully decorated with fresh flowers, and now the large mirrors reflected their many hued loveliness, heightened as it was by the gleam of brilliant lights. The old-fashioned furniture showed its richness on the occasion; and bronzes, ancient and modern, lent their artistic beauty to the scene. On a large table were placed pens and ink ready for the signers. Near by stood that grand ancestral dame, cold and still, in sculptured loveliness. Her outstretched finger seemed to point to the table, on which was to be signed the instrument which legalizes this binding of the young to the old, and her averted eye seemed to bear tokens of dissent to the sacrilegious act. At an early hour the guests began to assemble; many had come from miles away, and more from the immediate neighbourhood. Of the permanent guests, Madame de Neris was the first to appear in all the

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grandeur of a stiff red satin, with plumes to match. After her came the de Chambellas ladies in the traditional saffron hue chosen by brunettes. The one-armed Baron followed them; the breast of his coat showing, that what he had lost in limb he had gained in medals. Then appeared the Marquis; of medals gained by mere personal valour, the bridegroom-elect had none, but on his breast shone the stars and crosses of half the noble orders in Europe. Though they were numerous, there was room for them, for the Marquis had attained that portliness so significant of good living, of easy temper, and of fifty well-told healthy winters. The Marquis still clung to the sepulchral black suit, usual on these festive occasions, but Sydney and Armand appeared in that modern innovation of blue coat and light trowsers, which caused them to look less like revivified denizens of the grave. The Duke wore round his neck the red ribbon and cross of the Legion of Honour, to which he had a double title; first, from his rank, next, from his services on the field. In his button-hole he wore the green ribbon of Sardinia joined to the blue one given by Victoria to Crimean heroes. The Countess now entered with Lèonie; the latter wore a charming dress of pink *moire*, which became her brilliant complexion admirably. When Madame de Frissac appeared there was a suppressed murmur of admiration. Lèonie was beautiful; she was always so, but the Countess seemed ever willing to lessen her charms by

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the sad and sober hues of her costume; to-night, one might have thought she had arrayed herself for conquest; if so, she obtained it. The Count was astounded: for many years he had not seen her *decolletée*, and now as she came in, clad in a delicate lavender silk, a string of pearls encircling her white throat, he could scarcely repress an exclamation of surprise and pleasure. He thought her figure even more beautiful than when he had first seen it; for if now its girlishness had disappeared, it had been succeeded by a slight, but most becoming, *embonpoint*. The Countess caught her husband's eye, and interpreting aright his admiring gaze, blushed with pleasure. One other person saw and understood this bye-play; that was Morlot, who, standing in the shade of the window, engaged in putting on his gloves, managed at this juncture to tear them so dreadfully, that they were no longer fit for the evening's use. Madame de Frissac did not see this; nor did she see M. Morlot; her eye followed her husband as he left the room to seek his daughter. Hortense's paleness had often been remarked by her friends; they were all accustomed to it; but this evening she was as far paler than her usual self, as her usual self was fairer than a ruddy peasant. She entered, leaning on her father's arm; her step was firm, but slow, and she seemed relieved when the Count placed her in a chair. She sank into it heavily, as one who had just risen from a bed of suffering.

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Mortimer was sad as he gazed upon this young creature, whose heart once (ah, how short a time since!) beat high with health, hope, and the innocent enjoyment of youth—now so crushed, so broken. And this was the work of those who loved her most! to whom her slightest word on any other subject would have been law. Alas! for the *mariages de convenance!* There was the customary amount of chattering among the guests, the principal topics being the weather and the approaching marriage. The magnificence of Hortense's house in Paris, and her future position, as leader of the *ton*, were dilated upon with great gusto by the ladies de Chambellas and de Neris. The persons who, living in the neighbourhood, had merely been invited for this ceremony, were, of course, eager listeners. The gentlemen portion of these felt it their bounden duty to congratulate, numberless times, the bride and groom-elect; to the Marquis (for all his pompous air) this prominence over the general company was rather disagreeable; but Hortense received congratulations, compliments, all, with the same easy dignity, coupled with a painful, because constant, listlessness of manner.

"I believe we are ready now," said the notary, rubbing his hands, after having waited for some time, with that uneasiness noticeable in business-men, when among those of leisure.

"Yes, I think so," said the Count.

The notary then began to read the marriage con-

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tract, in which it was distinctly stated that Maurice Henri Philippe, Marquis de Claremont Brezè, with an income of —— thousand francs, possessor of house (described) in Paris, of three estates in different parts of France, beside the family chateau, was willing, and would contract marriage with Hortense Marie, demoiselle de Frissac, to be endowed by her parents with —— thousand francs dowry, the day of her marriage, plus, an annuity of ——, plus, a property in the department of the Limousin. And this, with the free and full consent of both parties, in token of which they had hereunto affixed their respective hands and seals. Most of the guests spoke together in terms of astonishment at the greatness of the fortune of both parties. To Sydney it seemed the most sordid barter well to be imagined in a marriage. Marriage contract! it was more like a deed of sale.

"And now the signature of Mademoiselle, if you please," said the notary. She rose slowly, walked to the table, and signed the document with an untrembling hand! Sydney's breath came hot and fast; he felt almost blinded by his emotion. She seemed so unfeeling! Hortense, in signing, had slightly blotted the page; the notary looked about for some sand.

"There is none, it appears," said the Count. "Ah! it does not signify: here's a bit of blotting paper." So saying he opened his wife's portfolio, which lay upon the table, tore out a leaf, and handed it to the lawyer. In doing this, a letter fell to the

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floor. Saying to his wife, "A sealed letter, Madame, and with no address," he handed it mechanically to the Countess.

"It cannot be for me," she said carelessly.

The Count opened the letter, read a few lines, and then turned pale; so pale that the Countess thought he was ill, and rushed to him. He caught the hand of the Marquis, who was now about to sign the contract, and in a voice trembling with rage and emotion cried out—"Stop! there is a mystery here, which must be unravelled before this ceremony can proceed. Madame," he continued, turning to his wife, "this letter, found in *your* portfolio, is, by a singular accident, unaddressed. Can you tell me for whom it is intended?"

There was that in his manner which drove the blood from her cheek. She took the letter from him, trembling in every limb. The handwriting was unknown to her; but a glance at the passionate avowal of love, and reference to past private meetings, left no doubt on her mind of the identity of the writer. She tried to speak, but could not; the eager gaping crowd, seeming like accusing demons to her, while there, with his stern eye fixed upon her blanched features, *he* stood,—that hard dread monitor, her husband!

The letter fell from her hands. "This letter, Count—"

"Is for *me*," said Hortense, who had taken it up. The girl stood face to face with her father. He the

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embodiment of stifled rage and shame, while she met his glance with unflinching eye, pale, motionless, but determined. Her mother saw not this painful picture; overcome by emotion, she had fainted.

"Leave this room, unhappy girl," he said, in a voice of thunder. "Marquis, do not speak. I know what you would say. I release you from your promise. I have some honour, though my daughter has none; you shall not disgrace your name by wedding this outcast. Leave the room, I say, nor dare to cast a look upon that virtuous mother who now lives to regret she ever bore so unworthy a child."

Hortense left her mother's side, where she had been standing, vainly endeavouring to bring back consciousness to the inanimate form. She turned slowly towards the door to obey her father's mandate. Her step was the same as when she entered—firm and dignified. She bore, without flinching, the stern scrutiny of indignant eyes which met her on every side. Not one sign did she give either of shame or defiance till she reached the door. Sydney Mortimer was standing there, and opened it to give her egress. Their eyes met for a moment—in his she read the deepest, most painful regret. It was well she was not seen now, for the proud heart had given way, the firm spirit—all, all—had perished, beneath that glance of grief and pity.

The scene in the drawing-room had become one of the utmost confusion—the Count, in his rage, was re-

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peating, almost involuntarily, passages from that burning letter. In vain Armand, the Marquis, and de Chambellas, tried to calm him; the torrent was let loose, and must take its course. Morlot was nowhere to be seen, the Countess had been assisted to her chamber, and the other ladies had retired, all expressing their horror and indignation at the conduct of this abandoned girl.

There was one heart that bled for her, however; one mouth that condemned her not. This was Lèonie's. As soon as she could, she left the bevy of females (who were now discovering, in past acts, very suspicious looks, and words, which they had at various times remarked in Hortense), and went softly up the stairs to her room. She knocked twice at the door before it was opened. Miss Staybrook stood there, and, to Lèonie's repeated request to see her kinswoman, replied that Hortense had retired to her chamber for the night, and could not possibly be disturbed. With a heavy heart, the kind little Lèonie sought her own room. When she reflected on Armand's love, and all the happiness which seemed in store for her, she asked Heaven why it had been so kind to her, giddy, foolish thing, while that lovely child was thus cruelly tried. That Hortense had been imprudent seemed evident: she must have had private meetings, and meetings in which love was spoken and understood; but, while the wretched father exaggerated, to a frightful extent, this misdemeanour, the

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kind-hearted Lèonie, in her own mind, tried to make Hortense appear as little guilty as possible. To all, the author of this mischief was unknown; the Count sought Hortense in her chamber, and with terrible threats and oaths exhorted her to tell the name of the man, that he might make him atone for the crime with his life. Threats, oaths, and fearful words, were all alike thrown away upon her; her calm answer to all was, "*I cannot do it.*" The half-crazed parent had even threatened violence to his child, but all to no avail. "Father, I cannot do it, it is impossible," was ever the reply. And so he left her, left her in disgrace; to be a prisoner in her own room, till he could find a convent, if a convent there was, whose doors would open to such as she!

Hortense heard the terrible doom passed upon her without one feeling of surprise or horror. All, all, was now alike to her. *He*, Sydney, no doubt, hated and despised her—would judge her guilty. Oh! that was agony too great to bear. Did he know the truth, she would be more reconciled to her miserable lot; but only at the expense of her mother's fame could she clear herself, and Hortense felt that she would rather die, than that grief or shame should overtake that loved—oh! how dearly loved—mother. To save her from a pang, she cared not if, in future, she were shut out from the world, to hear no sound but melancholy vesper bells, to see no forms but those of the gray-draped nuns, to hear no refrain save that of the

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sad, that ever repeated, "*Il faut mourir!*" It seemed to her as though fierce, eager, demon faces were peering at her, and that, as they swarmed around, her brain reeled with the melancholy cadence.

*Mourir! Mourir!* Oh! thought the poor suffering child, welcome, welcome, death, if life brings such misery as this. Ah! that stiff, firm governess did wrong when she denied entrance to that tender little kinswoman: her kindness, her sympathy, would have softened the blow under which the young girl was writhing.

The Count had retired to his room with the Marquis, and they sat discussing the affair. The Marquis was annoyed at the scandal to which it would give rise, and which would necessarily bring his name into disagreeable notoriety.

Various were the feelings which agitated that night the hearts of the different inmates of the chateau, but there was one person there who would willingly have undergone the most dreadful racking bodily tortures which ever inquisitors devised, to be released for one moment from the weight—the lead-like weight—of her own thoughts. That was the wretched mother, who, lying in her chair, received messages of kindness and concern for her health from her husband's distant sanctuary. "The discovery of what he believed to be his daughter's guilt had drawn him nearer her. If he were so shocked, what must she suffer?—that tender loving mother!" such were

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the messages he sent her. She was no longer a neglected wife; her child's noble self sacrifice had gained her her husband's much coveted consideration. But what a price to be paid for it! She shuddered at the thought. And what must Hortense think of her mother? Must she not despise her? She had not seen the stern look of the father, nor heard his anathema; but her heart smote her, when she thought of what the poor child must necessarily suffer.

"And I—I am the cause of this; I will go at once to her father, and confess all. I but wished to regain his love; he will not, cannot, see aught to blame therein. My actions were free from even the semblance of guilt. I will make him feel how deeply I love him. I will cause him to restore his love to that brave child. Our united tenderness shall repay her a thousand fold her sacrifice."

She at once stole down the stairs, and in a few moments stood at the door of that room into whose precincts she had once entered—tremblingly enough then, but what was it compared to now?

Her brain reeled; she must compose herself, in her nervous state she dare not face him; she would take a turn in the garden, to cool the fever which was consuming her; then, perhaps, she would have summoned courage. Quickly she strode through green allées lined with flowery banks, on, on, like an unquiet spirit disturbed in its last resting place, with

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her long white robe fluttering in the night breeze, and her hands clasped over her head, as if trying to retain by force the brain which seemed about to leave its tenement. Twice or thrice she passed him so close that he moved back to give her place, but not till the fourth time did she see Georges Morlot. She shuddered with anger and disgust, and drawing to her full height, said to him, "Never let me see you again." He followed her; he seemed collected, and spoke calmly; but, in reality, he was scarcely less agitated than herself.

"Countess, I could bear it no longer—your thanks, your friendly smiles, while I was burning with a love born long years ago. Have I ever hinted this?—have I not stifled the fire so effectually that you saw no harm in taking me to your friendship? Me, who can never feel mere *friendship* for you. I should not have allowed myself to approach so near the shrine of my idolatry. I might have known I could not stand the trial. It drove me mad at last, to see you ever kind, ever friendly, *but no more.* In a fatal moment I wrote that letter; in it I told my love, but assured you that were such your wish I should leave you forever and at once. I hoped—madly, passionately, insanely hoped—my love might have been returned."

"Returned! Can I believe my ears. I return your unholy love. I, a wife and mother! Have a care, Monsieur Morlot. You will find the Count

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de Frissac will resent any insult offered to his wife." She drew herself proudly up and looked at him. Her taunts and her contempt for him drove him mad.

"Yes, oh yes," said he, with a wild laugh, "the most noble Count de Frissac but yesterday refrained from fighting a duel with Baron Berkloff, on account of the lovely Mademoiselle X.—to-morrow will send a challenge to Monsieur Morlot to revenge the honour of his *much-loved* wife!"

The wound thus made was a deep one; from its very truth she found herself powerless—looking him fixedly in the eye she said in her bitterest tones, "Sir, you have insulted a defenceless woman." Then turned away, and hastily left him.

Although his code of honour was a poor one, Morlot felt deeply her remark, and cursed himself for so paining her, for, after all, he loved her; it was her indifference to him which made him almost beside himself with rage. When promising the Countess that he would reclaim her husband from his evil ways, that he would cause him to give her that love for which she so longed, he had counted upon the fact, that the Count's indifference to his wife was too deep seated to be changed. But lately he had observed that the Count seemed really awakening to his wife's grace and loving qualities, and feared should he become attentive to her, that he (Morlot) would find it then impossible to touch her heart; hence that fatal

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letter. He turned away when the Countess had left him, and as he did so he met the Duke de la Rocheconstant. Morlot looked keenly at him. Had he overheard them? No; he merely said, "Good evening, Monsieur Morlot," and his tone was, as usual, hearty and polite. Reassured, Morlot entered the house. But he was mistaken, Armand had heard, not all the conversation, but its termination. He had heard the Countess exclaim, "You have insulted a defenceless woman!" His mind was instantly made up. Madame de Frissac was not defenceless as long as *he* had a right arm to wield a sword or hold a pistol, but the affair must be managed so as to prevent scandal, not the slightest breath must taint her name.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### AN AFFRONT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

ARMAND was firm in his determination of offending Morlot; how it was to be done he knew not; but he fully made up his mind that during the evening he would accomplish his purpose. Upon entering the house he found several gentlemen assembled in the smoking-room, among whom were Morlot and Mortimer. The former was talking loudly, seemed much agitated, walked about the room, twitching his beard nervously, and glanced about with the vacant air of one who is preoccupied by some unpleasant subject. Two or three times he answered Monsieur Lebète rather sharply, and in such a manner as evinced that he had quite misunderstood the former's remarks. Armand observed him keenly. He felt an irresistible desire to spurn the man who could so far forget all sense of honour as to insult his hostess, and such a one, too, as the Countess. As I said above, Morlot was talking loudly, and at random. By some chance the conversation turned upon the late Italian campaign.



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Morlot joined in, having at each moment some bitter remark to make, reflecting, strange to say, upon the French army—in a tone hard for a member of it to bear.

Delighted at the turn of affairs, Armand made an occasional remark, which Morlot answered as captiously as he had before done those of Monsieur Lebète. At this juncture the Count de Frissac joined his guests. His advent but seemed to render Morlot more caustic, so that at last an uneasy feeling became general among those present. They glanced at the Duke, who sat tapping his boot with his stick, looking at Morlot with a strange light in his eye, which boded that individual no good. Sydney saw this and hastened to interfere.

"What shall we do to pass the time?" he said inquiringly. Now, to tell the truth, all present would have preferred retiring, but to do so at an earlier hour than usual, would they feared displease the Count, who suffering from the excitement of the discovery made about his daughter, would be the more susceptible at any change of the habits of his guests.

"Let us play," said Morlot quickly.

This was agreed to, and speedily all were gathered around the card table. Morlot seemed still to be under uncontrollable excitement, and he continued making bitter and sarcastic remarks, to the utter disgust of Monsieur Lebète and his friends, who soon

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made up their minds to have nothing to say to a person so impolite and so forgetful of what was due to others. To add to Morlot's unsettled frame of mind, he lost heavily, and as the play proceeded, he became more and more unbearable. Armand continued playing quietly, but Sydney was annoyed to observe that he still eyed Morlot with that dangerous look. By some fatality the latter got again upon the subject of the late campaign, and, as before, he was decidedly uncomplimentary to those brave soldiers, who, by a series of brilliant victories, shed such lustre upon the arms of France.

"Why," said he, "the Emperor Napoleon would never have made peace at Villafranca, had it not been that he well knew that his troops could do no more. I had it from an officer high in command, and one whom I can trust."

Armand laughed rather contemptuously, and looking at Morlot, said, "Can you give me the name of that reliable officer. *I* was in Italy during the whole of the campaign, and I can certify that the French army would have continued to perform such great deeds as had already been accomplished, had not the peace put an end to a campaign which was but a succession of victories. It is strange, to say the least of it, that a Frenchman should be ready to underdate such glorious deeds on the part of his countrymen."

"I tell you, Sir," interrupted Morlot quickly,

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"that my informant is an officer of high rank, and that he said another battle would have seen France humiliated in the dust, would have shorn her of her laurels so quickly and so easily won, would have—"

"By heaven," said Armand, springing to his feet with a flash of anger lighting in his eye, "you speak as though you could have desired such a consummation. I tell you, Sir, that your informant wilfully misrepresented the facts, and that he must be but a lukewarm patriot to assert such things as you have repeated."

"He is of high rank," replied Morlot; "you are but a captain, and had not the opportunities of judging which my friend possessed. Your military experience is perhaps not so extensive as that of my friend."

"My military experience," replied the Duke, "is of sufficient extent to make me resent any outrage to my country, as quickly as to my own honour, and I proclaim your friend either a blockhead or a traitor."

Contrary to Armand's expectations, Morlot burst into a fit of laughter, saying, "Well, perhaps he is, and no wonder, for half our soldiers are either one or the other. No offence meant, Monsieur le Duc," said he, bowing ceremoniously to Armand.

The Count saw that the evening was not likely to terminate without a quarrel, unless he could manage to separate the party. Sydney felt this also, and he determined to draw Armand away. Had it been an

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ordinary occasion he might have succeeded; the Duke had given too many proofs of his courage on the battle field to dread his motives being misconstrued, were he to avoid a quarrel; but he was determined that ere they separated he would accomplish his design of insulting Morlot, so he quickly defeated Sydney's well-meant endeavours to entice him from the room, and prevented the Count's doing the same for Morlot, by challenging the latter personage to a game of *ecarté*. Morlot accepted, and they were soon immersed in the play.

"You are lucky, Monsieur le Duc," said Morlot at last.

"Yes," said Armand, "you should be reconciled to your ill fortune in cards, as I dare say you are, as the proverb says, more fortunate with your lady love."

This remark caused the blood to flow into Morlot's cheek—he eyed the Duke keenly for a moment; did he overhear the Countess, thought Morlot; he feared so, and hated Armand for it. His ill luck continued to the manifest delight of Monsieur Lebète and friends, who crowded behind the Duke, seemingly overjoyed at his good fortune. Morlot's manner at last became so offensive that the Duke rose from his chair, saying as he did so:

"I play no more, Sir. You seem to have lost your senses, and to imagine yourself in a pot-house, instead of under the roof of our friend, Count de Frissac."

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Here, again, Morlot saw an allusion to his interview with the Countess, and becoming enraged beyond all bounds, he made an answer to the Duke, which was unheard by those near him, but which caused Armand to turn upon Morlot and strike him in the face with his glove.

"A blow!" cried Morlot. "I will be revenged;" and he would have rushed upon the Duke, had he not been held back forcibly by the Count.

"You shall hear from me," he shouted, as Sydney led Armand away.

No attempt was made to settle the difficulty by any other method than an appeal to arms. All felt that 'twas thus the affair should end. Armand chose Sydney as his second, and the Count was to act for Morlot.

Early the next morning four persons stole gently away from the chateau. At a short distance from the park entrance stood another awaiting their coming.

"Good morning, Doctor," said Armand, while the Count stepping forward, took the physician's arm and led him on. He had written a short note the night before, asking the Doctor to meet them at the place above mentioned, the tenour of his letter was such that the Count knew the man of science would not fail the appointment. As they walked on the Doctor was evidently expostulating, and he continued so doing until the Count hastily exclaimed, "Doctor, there was a blow given."

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No more was said; a Frenchman never forgives a blow; nothing wipes that stain away but blood. It is a strange inconsistency in the laws of duelling, that which makes it a necessity there should be blood spilled on such an occasion—the offended or his adversary, one or the other must bleed. Some one's life must be in jeopardy—murder must be tempted to atone for a blow.

The party walked on in silence. Sydney, generous, hasty Sydney, was sad, although he was the very soul of honour, and although he felt that were *he* either of the parties concerned, he should act as they were doing, he regretted that two persons whom he knew so intimately, one of whom he liked so much, and the other whom he could but respect, seeing him so firm in the hour of danger, were to attempt to take each other's lives—were to endeavour to take that which is God-given, and which religion and law render sacred in our eyes. Morlot was also silent, but the inherent courage of a Frenchman, that military spirit with which they all seem imbued, causes them generally to behave well in such scenes as I am now describing. He seemed quiet, and as indifferent as one can well be upon the eve of taking a life, or of having one's own unduly shortened. Armand, the brave soldier, who had scaled heights covered with a dauntless foe, with loud cheers of encouragement to his men, who had rushed with a smile upon almost certain death, was now grave and silent. To *gentlemen* there

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must ever be something solemn in a duel; the bully or the braggadocio alone disgraces himself by unseemly levity on such an occasion.

At last a favourable spot (heaven save the mark!) was chosen. The seconds loaded the pistols, and, as had been arranged the evening before, gave a weapon to each of the combatants, who were to be placed twenty paces from each other, the word given, and then each man was to step forward, firing at the word, or later as he chose. Sydney pressed the Duke's hand with fervour, and as the eyes of these men met, Armand saw that in Sydney's glance, which made him inwardly swear eternal friendship for the young Englishman. The Duke and Morlot having taken their places, the Count gave the signal. Morlot took two or three rapid steps forwards, raised his pistol, and fired. The Duke half turned, and his left arm fell powerless by his side. He paused a moment, reeled, and seemed about to fall, while a deathly pallor spread over his countenance. Sydney sprang towards him, but Armand suddenly raised himself to his full height, and fixing a terrible look upon Morlot, strode towards him. As the Duke approached, Morlot glanced uneasily from side to side, as though he half contemplated flying. He looked at the Count, who when it seemed that the Duke was about to fall, had moved forwards, but who now stood immovably erect with folded arms. Sydney had likewise paused, while the doctor remained seated on a fallen tree,

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where he had placed himself at the commencement of affairs. He was quietly breathing upon an ugly-looking steel instrument, and polishing it upon the sleeve of his coat. All this Morlot took in at a glance. He now raised his head, and stood looking full at the Duke, who was rapidly advancing upon him; though as pale, if not more so, than Armand, Morlot awaited certain death with an air that was really noble. So much does courage elevate the man. And now the Duke stood so near, that by extending his arm, he could touch his adversary. He still had that terrible look of the eye, and his left hand was covered with the blood which was trickling down his wounded arm. Armand slowly raised his pistol, until it was on a level with Morlot's forehead, and almost touching it. The Count turned away; he could not calmly gaze upon such a death; even the old doctor, callous as he was, rose with a shiver to his feet. Sydney, horror-stricken, gazed at Armand with starting eye-balls; great drops of perspiration rolled down his forehead, he gasped in his agony. He would have cried out, but his throat was parched. He would have rushed forward, but he was spellbound. For a moment the Duke held his death-laden weapon at Morlot's forehead, his eye had lost none of its ferocity; but that moment passed, another, a softer look, a more noble expression came into those piercing orbs; turning aside, the Duke fired his weapon in the air, exclaiming proudly, as he did so,

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"I cannot; a De la Rocheconstant never struck an unarmed foe!"

With a cry of joy, deep and heart-felt, Sydney rushed into Armand's arms, and embraced him with a warmth that proved how great had been his agony of fear. The Count came forward quickly, and taking the Duke by the arm, said "You are a noble fellow—I esteem and thank you."

The doctor now rushed up and began dragging off the Duke's coat. "Let us see about the arm," said he roughly, but as he did so, a tear stood in his eye.

Morlot looked at the Duke for a moment in silence, and then exclaimed: "Monsieur le Duc, I may now say that I am sorry we should have quarrelled. I beg your pardon, and regret that the occasion for it should ever have existed. You may rest assured that henceforth no act of mine shall offend you."

The Duke, who understood Morlot's meaning, smilingly extended his hand, and thus ended the duel.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### A FREAK OF THE BLIND GODDESS.

Sydney saw Armand safely ensconsed in bed, and waited till the physician pronounced upon the nature of his wound. A ball was found lodged near the elbow of the left arm; after a painful operation it was extracted. The bone, fortunately, had not been injured, and therefore the Duke's confinement to his room would not be of long duration. The doctor recommended care and attention, and, above all, the avoidance of exposure; if cold were to settle in the arm, inflammation would certainly ensue, and the consequences might be extremely serious. A cooling draught was prescribed, and the patient was then left to repose. Poor Lèonie! As yet she was lying asleep (it being long before her hour of rising) in happy ignorance of passing events.

"Duke," said Sydney, when the doctor had departed, "I am glad your wound is not dangerous; had it been otherwise, my determination would have been altered. As it is, you will undertand

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readily the feeling which forces me to leave this house without even seeing again any one of its inmates."

"I know, Sydney, you had formed for yourself an ideal."

"Which exists no longer. Destroyed by her own act. Armand, as long as I believed her the willing victim, ready to be led forth to hateful nuptials to please her parents, I forgave her; nay, I even admired her filial love and devotion, although they forced her to commit a perjury; but, oh, my friend, that she, when on the very point of entering into that holy engagement with one man, should have allowed herself to be led away by another, denotes a soul far less pure than that which I loved,—love still! Fain would I shut her image from my heart as one unworthy to hold sway there; all my efforts are futile. I have loved once—'twill be forever."

The sick man pressed his friend's hand in token of heart-felt sympathy. He could find no words of consolation. Hortense's conduct was inexplicable. Her manner, when claiming the letter, had been so marked by an utter recklessness of the opinion of those present, that Armand, in spite of himself, was obliged to acknowledge that she showed no maidenly shame at the appalling discovery.

"Now, my friend, you must make my *adieux* to our host and hostess; to *her*, if you see her, do not, I pray you, mention my name. 'Present my respects

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to Madame Ligault. Did I not speak truly when I said she meant nothing by flirting, but that she loved you truly all the while? No; all that your Lèonie did was open and honest, while *she*, with her fair face and meek eyes, with her reserved manner and downcast looks, she was really guilty. But 'tis madness thus to torture one's brain for an unworthy woman. After a few weeks' travel I shall be quite myself again. And now good-bye, my dear friend; you will not fail to explain my hasty departure satisfactorily?"

Armand said he would do so, and then with many protestations of good feeling, the young men separated. Sydney took the early train for Paris; when he arrived at the capital, he saw that M. Georges Morlot had been his fellow traveller. Neither party felt inclined to open a conversation, so nothing but a ceremonious raising of hats, as they both left the terminus, indicated that these two gentlemen had ever before seen each other. Both went their ways—both with sorrow, deep sorrow, weighing on their hearts, but from what widely-different causes!

The affair of the evening before had been so painful in every respect, that the assembled guests could show no more real charity to the afflicted family, than by leaving their hospitable roof immediately. They felt also that condolences would but recall the sad cause of them, so in their leave-taking wisely abstained from any reference to the affair. Thus, by

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noon-day train to Paris, the de Chambellas family, the Marquis, and Madame de Neris departed together with M. Lebète and friends. As for the Countess, her mind was made up on one point—she would allow her daughter to remain no longer under the unjust suspicion of having encouraged the advance of some unknown person.

She blamed herself for not having sought the Count and told him the truth. She had passed the night in resolves to clear her daughter at any price, and her first act in the morning was to seek her husband. She went first to his chamber and knocked; no reply. He must be already in the study, said she. So, for the third time in her life, she proceeded thither. She stood before the door—pale, sad—but firm and unshrinking; she had a duty to perform—an imperative one; to clear her daughter, and show the father what must be the depth of that child's love for her parents, when she had so willingly sacrified herself for one of them. "As for myself," said she, "if he cannot overlook my imprudence, then let me take the consequences of it; they shall not fall on that innocent child." Thrice she knocked at the study door, and there was no answer; she began to feel alarmed. Where could he be? She turned to descend the stairs, and met Levert, the Count's valet.

"Where is your master?" she asked.

"He is gone, Madame la Comtesse."

"Gone! gone where?"

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"The Count left for Paris this morning, Madame."

"Are you not to accompany the Count?"

"No, Madame, my master's orders were, that I should remain."

"Did the Count leave no word for me?"

"Yes, Madame, Monsieur ordered me to give this billet to Madame la Comtesse as soon as she came down." So saying he produced a note, and handed it to his mistress. It was from the Count, and ran as follows:

"DEAREST WIFE,

"I am called away on most important business. I did not wish to disturb you to say good-bye; your nerves were so shaken by that horrible affair of last night. I cannot say how long I shall be gone—'tis no pleasure trip this time, but one of grave importance. You will hear from me at my first stopping place. Do not pine, dear wife, for that ungrateful girl. God bless you.

"Your affectionate Husband."

A strange feeling of pleasure came over the wife as she read this affectionate epistle. It was many years since he had written to her in that strain. She kissed the letter, and put it away among her treasures. Still she was not happy—he was gone, and gone with the conviction of Hortense's guilt. Gone before she could tell that that fatal letter was for her—his wife! She hoped he would return soon; if he did not come

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back before the week was out, she would write to him the truth—write him that which might cause him to shun her presence forever! It was heart-rending, but it was her duty, and she must perform it.

It was decided Armand should remain at the chateau until he had completely recovered his strength and the use of his arm. Armand was delighted with this arrangement, as Lèonie was to remain with the Countess until her marriage. When this would take place no one could tell; Armand's wound would retard his researches after the Director-Generalship, even were it easily found. So they must wait. A miserable month was thus passed; miserable to all except Armand and Lèonie, whose bright hopes for the future made even the sad present gay. In a couple of weeks' time the Duke had so far recovered, as to be able to resume those delightful walks, accompanied always by the tender nurse. They sought the old stone bench, where their first vows of love had been spoken, and here they formed many a happy scheme for the future. Here it was, also, that Lèonie detailed the story of her girlhood and her married life—sometimes a touch of sadness was visible in her eye as she referred to the past melancholy scenes, but her natural love of humour returned when speaking of that miserable old uncle, who even grudged her her small share of the beet salade.

"I wish you could see him, Armand," she said. "Miserable old man! And yet, no! You would

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perhaps despise your little Lèonie, if you saw what a wretched specimen of humanity her nearest relation is."

"I love you for yourself, not for your relations, Lèonie; you are dearer than all the world to me; nothing can increase or diminish my affection—neither the grandeur nor poverty of your relations."

Those insipid nothings which to lovers are always new, were repeated of course every day in the month, and every hour in the day. Yes, they at least were happy!

Hortense had obeyed her father's command to the letter; she remained a close prisoner in her room; Miss Staybrook was her constant companion. The Countess stayed many hours daily with her daughter in her little childhood's nook, but days passed before the affair was spoken of. The mother was often on the point of beginning a conversation relating to what had passed, but Hortense did not encourage her so doing. She believed her mother entirely guiltless, and almost feared her own revelations would prove her not so. But at last the Countess began. She explained to her child the whole affair between Monsieur Morlot and herself, touching as lightly as possible on the Count's indifference to her, and his irregularities in other quarters. Hortense consoled her mother for all, by her loving words and fond embraces. She knew it was something of that kind, she said.

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"And now, my child, it is my duty to right you with your father; to your generous self-sacrifice of that dreadful night, I owe more than my life—for oh, Hortense, even had that letter been intended for you, in course of time your father would have forgiven it, attributing the misdemeanor to the inexperience of youth. But what excuse could be found for me, were I guilty!—for me, a woman of sedate years, a wife, a mother. It would be wrong to overlook a fault committed then, at years when its full enormity could not but be apparent. But Hortense, dearest, whether your father will believe or not my entire innocence—it is no less my duty to clear you of the stain which exists, at least in your father's eyes."

Hortense deprecated a too sudden revelation of the truth to her father. Let his anger once thoroughly subside, and then he might be told. The Countess had received several letters from her husband. He was going hastily from one place to another, and his wife surmised he was endeavouring thus to change the current of his bitter thoughts. His letters to his wife were brimming over with love for her. He alluded to his past neglect, and said he could not understand himself thus to have overlooked happiness which was in his own home, and have been blind enough to have grasped at its shadow elsewhere. The poor wife read these letters until they were engraved upon her heart. Never in one of them had the Count referred to his daughter or the affair—once

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only he had implored her not to sink under the calamity, but to bear up for his sake. Her answers were certainly not less affectionate, but with every one she despatched, there was a dreadful feeling of self-reproach. She had told him every act of her daily routine, her walks, her visits, the improvement in Armand's health, her very thoughts, all, all except *that*. It was so difficult to approach the subject in a letter, and then Hortense urged innumerable objections to her doing so.

"Wait," the child said to her mother, "till this new born love grows deeply rooted, and then tell him the truth." It was to be feared that with his hasty disposition, he would see in the Countess's private interview with Morlot, even when its object was so pure, an imprudence that no modest wife should have been guilty of. The mother saw the force of these arguments, but still duty whispered her not to accept this continued sacrifice at her daughter's hands.

"Sacrifice, mother," said Hortense; "there is none. I care not for the good opinion of the world." She did not, now she had lost *his*. "I assure you I bless the circumstance which has rid me of that hated Marquis, for I may now own, dearest mother, how averse I was to wedding him."

Again and again was this conversation repeated; Hortense always begging her mother to be silent, and the Countess feeling she should not grant this re-

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quest, yet shrinking ever from that dreadful revelation. Had he been stern, unbending, cold, in his letters, had they been the stiff, oftentimes harsh, epistles of former days, she could have nerved herself up to this task as she had often before to hardly less dreaded ones; but now he was so changed, so kind, so loving, so like what she had wished him to be, but never dared to hope he would become, that while she blamed herself for accepting these tokens of affection, which she feared would be withdrawn did he know all, she had not strength of mind enough to dash down the cup of happiness which kind fate had just placed to her lips.

In every letter to the Count she urged him to return. He could not as yet, he replied, his business had not come to a satisfactory termination, he must yet defer his return though he longed to be again with his dear wife. Sometimes he fixed a date as the probable one for his arrival, and then, when she had passed hours in anxious expectation, a letter would come, saying that his affairs were not yet concluded: and so passed six weeks.

One day, about this time, Lèonie and Armand were sitting in a little room, which from its beauty and gay appearance, you would never have supposed could exist in such close proximity to that solemn, cold reception room where the marble lady stood, and from whence her young descendant had been so ignominiously expelled. There was something chilling in that room; the magnificence of its appoint-

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ments seemed but to add to its melancholy grandeur. Lèonie could never be induced to enter its doors since that sad night, so she had installed herself in this gay little room on the same floor, into which she could go, and from which she could emerge without even a glimpse of those ponderous white and gold doors, which gave entrance to the dreaded sanctuary. Lèonie's boudoir was like herself, gay and bright, the little tables were filled with roses from the conservatory, for it was now winter, and they bloomed no longer in the garden. On a centre table stood a marvellous production of bronze and pure crystal, so richly cut and filled with such clear fresh water, that it was enough to make all other gold fishes die of envy at the good fortune of the two diminutive creatures of that species now occupying this fairy abode. Bird cages there were too, pagodas, kiosks, and mosques; in these foreign edifices dwelt little unforeign feathered friends of Lèonie. She averred they all knew her, had no secrets from her, looked upon her as their best friend, and that 'twas to show a proper appreciation of her good will towards them, that they kept up such unceasing song. The hangings of the room were of light blue damask, which peculiarly suited Lèonie's clear complexion. Well did the little coquette know this, when she chose this as her lair. You could but have shared Armand's admiration of her, had you have seen her seated in a luxurious fauteuil, dressed in a delicate gray silk morning dress,

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with a head-dress *she* called a cap, though it resembled not in the least the stiff and matronly article usually so denominated. It was a mass of white lace and gray ribbons, and, far from concealing the hair (or the back of it, a cap's most frequent use), it passed coquettishly over the top of the head and ears, leaving the great mass of rich black hair quite uncovered and ready to be admired. It was admired often and often, but to-day the *femme de chambre* had twisted it more loosely than usual, which caused it to look so immensely thick, that Armand, in a tantalizing mood, shook his head doubtfully, and said he half suspected there was some adulteration in it, à la Neris. At this, Lèonie grew very indignant, called him a great teaze, and begged him to go on with the book he was reading to her—while she was embroidering with gold and silver threads, a blue velvet smoking cap, which she declared was to be her Christmas gift to the Count de Frissac—Armand averring all the while 'twas for himself. Time proved the correctness of his surmise.

He had only read a few words, when a knock was heard at the door, and a servant entered. He came to announce the arrival of a "Monsieur" who desired to speak with Madame Ligault. The person had not given his name, as he said he had not the honour of Madame's acquaintance, his visit was chiefly one of business.

"Where is he, Justin?" asked she.

"In the small saloon, Madame."

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"Say I will come directly."

The servant bowed and withdrew.

Armand at first asserted his right to accompany her, he did not like these visits from strange men. But Lèonie promised she would not be more than ten minutes; he must let her go alone. The lover moodily consented, saying he must await her return there. She went away, and was gone a half-hour, during which time Armand sat on the open piano, making such a noise that all the birds stood still on their perches and ruffled their feathers with fear. As minutes wore away the impatient lover tried to get on with his book, but he read the same passages over a dozen times without understanding a word. He took up Lèonie's thimble and ball of silk and dropped them successively into the domain of the gold fishes —these injured inhabitants immediately knocking their heads against the sides of the globe with the evident idea, from the transparency of the glass, that nothing prevented their sailing away into boundless waters, thus escaping all intrusion. Failing in this laudable attempt they strike off to the right or left, and meeting there with no resistance, they go round and round under the pleasing delusion (piscatorial authorities so assure us) that they are sailing off in a straight line. Armand thought, with a sigh, of how great an analogy there exists between many of his fellow creatures and those sunny-sided little fellows,

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whisking about with so great a splash and flurry, and yet accomplishing so little.

Having tired himself with this philosophical reflection, Armand pulled off a rose bud and tickled the little spaniel's nose with it. Here he met with a determined, I might say dogged, resistance, which came to a satisfactory conclusion, by Armand throwing the bud in the fire, and making the *amende honourable* to Fido by offering to him a piece of sugar pilfered from the birds.

The door now opened and Lèonie entered. Armand, who had resolved upon silent indignation, nay, upon the most withering unconcern, said not a word as she approached him. She did not notice his manner, for her eyes were sparkling with pleasure, and yet there was a touch of sadness in them, not usual with Lèonie.

"Oh Armand! I hardly know where to begin."

"I should think not," said he, "you and the gentleman must have touched upon a great many subjects to keep you away so long."

"We only touched on one."

"Ah indeed! pray was the gentleman one of those Russian princes or German barons who has thus come to give you an agreeable surprise?"

"The gentleman was a lawyer."

"A lawyer?"

"Yes, Armand, my uncle is dead."

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"What, old beet salade! You'll have to bear the expense of his funeral, Lèonie," said Armand.

This was very wicked of Armand, but the fact is, he had so often laughed at her uncle's penurious and miserly habits, that the defunct was not a very highly revered person. Several times, since she had left her uncle, had Lèonie sent him presents of money to repay the trouble and expense she had been to him before her marriage. The old man had received these offers with much pleasure, assuring his niece that he was sadly in need of any assistance she could give him.

Armand knew this, so, on the whole, the Duke must be excused for having spoken thus irreverently of the departed.

"No Armand, his funeral has already taken place, and as he has left no will, I am (so the lawyer says) the heiress to the property."

"Property? the bowl which contained the beet salade and the wooden spoon and fork with which he meted out to you your modicum, I suppose?"

"I really can't understand it, but yet I suppose it must be true. Monsieur Dubois tells me that my uncle has left two millions of francs, and that I am the sole heiress to that enormous sum."

Armand took her hands, kissed first one and then the other, saying he felt quite abashed in the presence of so great a financial personage.

"I shall only be glad of this on one account, dear Armand," said she, paying no attention to his pleas-



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antry, "it will allow us to get married immediately."

"Ah no, Lèonie, that it will not," said he seriously enough now; "wait till you more fully appreciate your change of position; perhaps your mind may change about me. You might marry with such a fortune the highest rank and with equal riches. I am but a poor soldier, with hardly a penny to call my own, how dare I aspire to you, twice a millionnaire! What am I?"

"You are my own true loved one, Armand," said she, softly putting her arm through his. "I am so sorry I'm rich now; but you will marry me?" she asked agitatedly.

"Not now, little Crœsus," said he, beginning that old trick of his, of patting first one little dimpled hand and then the other. "Wait till I get my Rogueship if you please. I don't wish people to say, 'You know La Rocheconstant, he has ferreted out a widow enormously rich, and, of course, hastens to marry her.'"

"What does that signify," said the little suppliant, "as long as I know you don't."

"Once upon a time," said Armand, oratorically, "there was an old Quaker who gave the following advice to his son: 'Above all, my child, never marry a woman who has more money than thou. When I married thy mother she had two shillings—I, but one-

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and-nine—and ever since she has been throwing up to me the odd threepence.'"

"Thank you for the imputation, Monsieur Armand," said Lèonie, poutingly. She added something about not appreciating such nonsense, and endeavoured to put on a most now-I'm-offended-and-shall-never-make-it-up-again air; but she soon gave this over, for she saw beneath his lively manner the Duke was in earnest. Still she considered it a very foolish pride; she said that he knew well enough that had he been the recipient of a fortune instead of herself, he would have married her at once.

He said the case would have been quite different, which fact she could not or would not comprehend. No, he would put off their marriage till he got some lucrative position, and then he would of course attend to its duties seriously, instead of enjoying the leisure which his wife's fortune would so easily permit. She coaxed him with characteristic vehemence, but he was implacable—she appealed to an imaginary person and repeated, "Isn't he the most disagreeable, stubborn, man alive?" and like expressions of displeasure.

"Well, then," said she, "I wish he had not died."

Poor impetuous Lèonie. Armand but laughed at her. She accused him of making undue use of the power her affection gave him over her, said all men were tyrants or bears, and that, as for him, he was both; in fact, she got into quite a passion and left him, she said, *forever*. She remained seven

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seconds out of the room, and then came back, under some lame pretence of searching for her work, to be fondled and kissed by the tyrant and bear.

A few days afterwards the high-capped servant maid, for so many years her uncle's only domestic, appeared at the chateau, summoned thither by a letter from Lèonie. It seemed by the woman's account that the old miser, stricken with a low fever, had laid and tossed in his bed for weeks before he could be induced to send for medical aid. "He'll come and give me physic which will do me no good, and then I shall have it all to pay for," growled the miserable creature, in answer to the servant's repeated entreaties that he should see the doctor. He had even rebuked her for buying a few herbs with which to make those concoctions of roots, &c., so popular in France. At last the village priest had taken upon himself to bring in the doctor; but it was too late. The man of science frankly told him so, upon which Lèonie's uncle growled again, and asked him whether he should have to pay him for his good news.

"No," said the doctor, "as you are so poor, I shall make no charge." The good curé who knew something more of the old man's means, urged upon him the necessity of making a will.

"I have thought of it," said Lèonie's uncle, "but it is such a trouble and such an expense." The old miser then turned his face to the wall, and in a few

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moments, love, hope, despair, even the ruling passion of his life, avarice, all were alike indifferent to him.

He had made no will, and as Lèonie was his only relative, she inherited his property, which, to the amazement of all his neighbours, amounted to two millions of francs.

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## CHAPTER XV.

### THE CONFESSION.

THE Countess de Frissac did not fail to impart to her husband the news of Lèonie's heritage, as well as Armand's noble determination not to marry until he could himself contribute to the home fund. She spoke of Lèonie's great annoyance at this, and of her accusing Armand of foolish pride. Indeed the little lady had made some vague threats of searching out Monsieur Lebète, for the purpose of discovering if *he* would be so scrupulous. To this plan Armand readily acceded, and it is believed that for one whole afternoon the lovers maintained a dignified and offended silence towards each other. Armand was now almost entirely well, and spoke of returning to Paris; Lèonie, of course, desired him to remain at the chateau, but as the Directorship did not come to him, it was evident the Duke, a second Mahomet, must go to it.

Christmas was fast approaching, and the Countess wrote to ask her husband if he would be home for the festivities; if so, whether or not she should invite

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Armand to remain and pass it with them. She had fully intended, when she began this letter, to write a few of the passing events, and then divulge to him what she felt he should have known long before. But, as she looked over the four well-filled pages, she saw at once that the subject could not be touched upon after such a mass of trivialities. Either she must destroy this letter and write another, which would refer but to the one affair, or she must leave it as it was, and not touch upon *that* subject at all. She resolved upon the latter course; there were many things it was important he should know in the epistle just concluded; she hoped, too, that his answer to it would be, that she might count upon his return for Christmas; if so, then she would tell him all. She felt that one spoken word would clear away a thousand doubts, to which an ambiguous sentence in a letter might give rise. She had waited till now—she would wait till his return. So she directed her letter and sent it. She waited two weeks without a reply. She was beginning to get seriously uneasy; she feared he had fallen ill. A dreadful fear entered her mind. Had Marlot thrown himself in the Count's path, and with deceit and hypocrisy given a false explanation of the affair? Criminating her, but clearing himself! In the midst of the anguish of mind, occasioned by this idea, she received one evening a telegraphic despatch; she took it tremblingly. What is there in those large square envelopes that always awakens fear? She

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opened it quickly, to be out of her suspense. It was from the Count, dated Paris, saying he would arrive at the chateau by the next morning's early train. She was glad he was coming. This was the reason he had not answered her letter; he intended to return so soon. She was glad, and yet why did she seat herself and draw deep sighs? He was coming, and now he must be told. She could no longer quiet her own conscience, by saying she must not speak of it in a letter: she wished now that she had done so: she regretted she had not told him at least one fact—that the criminating letter was for her; if she had done this by letter, in conversation, she could have cleared away his doubts. But, had he been made acquainted with that one bare fact, would he ever have returned to receive here self-justification? Was it not likely that, in his rage, he would return to those haunts from which he had been saved at so great a cost to herself? She feared, and therefore tried to assure herself it was better as it was—better that he should hear the truth from her lips, and not through the narrow channel of written words. And thus she waited the twelve hours which preceded his coming, repeating mentally what she should say. She would not utter untruth, but she would put truth in its most forcible terms.

The next morning he came. It was so early that, besides the servants, no one but the Countess was up. He looked fatigued and careworn, but embraced his

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wife with a fondness, unparalleled even in the early days of their wedded life. Breakfast was served, during which time the wife asked many questions about his trip. These he seemed to parry and avoid. But she had resolved—firmly resolved—to tell him all, and that before another hour had passed over her head. After breakfast they retired to the Countess's boudoir—that luxurious room where Morlot had uttered words which first raised suspicion in the mind of the innocent participant in his schemes. The Count had often spoken of Morlot in his letters; and to-day he said—"How strange that Morlot should not have written to me. I was even surprised at his departure, *he* might have stayed without indiscretion. I suppose he felt a delicacy about so doing, but that he should not have written does, indeed, seem strange."

He was not looking at his wife, else he would have seen her face grow pale and then red, as it always did when that now hated name was mentioned.

"I suppose he hardly knows what subject to touch upon; to speak of *that* would wound me, to ignore it seems heartless in so old a friend." The wife said that, if he had wished to write, he might merely have spoken of his own future plans, and asked the Count if he were not going on one of their usual trips in the winter.

"True, he might; but I shall not go with him:



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I shall, for the future, have you, dearest, as the companion of my voyages. I have been thinking that a trip somewhere would do you good: if you like we will go when I have made the necessary arrangements to rid us of the presence of that unworthy girl." He had himself touched upon the subject that she had been trying to approach. He continued: "My wife, I have written to the superior of a convent to express my wish to enter Hortense as a novitiate; I fear that the answer will be that, as the act which thus throws obloquy on our name is of so recent date, they would have some scruples in accepting her, unless Hortense expressed her full and entire desire to leave the world in which she so disgraced herself. You know these holy women will only receive amongst them persons of whose entire repentance they are convinced. You are aware that I have not seen Hortense since that evening—that evening, when at one moment she stood the bride-elect of a noble gentleman, the pride of her parents' heart, the envied possessor of all this world's goods, and at the next she was an outcast—a creature who had ruined herself, and stained our hitherto spotless name."

The Countess shuddered: that stain on the name was, after all, the chief cause of sorrow to this proud man; how much deeper would that stain be if thrown on the untainted escutcheon by the wife instead of the daughter. And yet she was not guilty, not even in thought, much less in word or deed. But could

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she make him believe this, after that burning, passionate letter, in which there was no mention of coldness on the part of the person addressed? The afflicted wife felt how much circumstantial evidence against her there was. She had met this man in private more than once: would the Count believe her when she named the object of these interviews?

"Henri, you are too hard upon the poor child," said she in reply to the Count's vehement and angry burst against Hortense.

"Wife, you do not know the full extent of her perfidy; I will tell you that on that eventful night I sat deliberating with de Chambellas, who, the only parent amongst the guests, could appreciate my feelings. I mentioned my belief that the man who thus shamefully enticed the girl's affections must be some person from one of the neighbouring chateaux, and not a guest of our own. De Chambellas obstinately persisted in a belief that the deceiver was that night under our roof; and that he had been my guest for several weeks. He asserted this with so much decision, that I suspected he had obtained some clue to the affair, and that this belief was not occasioned by mere surmise. I questioned him so closely that at last the Baron confessed, that about two hours after the ladies had retired, leaning from his chamber window, he had observed a female figure emerge from the door leading into the garden; the person walked up and down the principal path several times, as if

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that were a settled place of rendezvous. After the lapse of a few minutes, she was joined by a man; with whom she had a short but earnest conversation, to judge from the energy of her motions, and then she returned to the house. The man was lost behind the shade of the trees; but some minutes later he reappeared, and entered the chateau, with the air of one who was dwelling there. This must have taken place while I was with the Marquis in my study."

During this recital the Countess had turned ashy pale, and her breath came forth in short gasps. The Count noticed her agitation, but attributed it to the natural emotion of a mother on thus hearing the confirmation of her child's guilt.

"But," said she, after a moment's pause, for the new evidence against her had so startled the wife that she was uncertain how to begin a confession in which every action, in itself so innocent, seemed so guilty. "But you are not sure this female was Hortense."

"Who else could it be?" he said, almost angrily. "Lèonie, already engaged to Armand, would have had no need to seek a nocturnal interview with him in a deserted garden. Nor is it likely Madame de Neris, at her years, would desire to commit such an imprudence, even if there had been a man alive to encourage her to do so. Mention Madame de Chambellas and her daughter, Helene, who is always under as strict surveillance as any infant, and you have the effective of our female guests. Those who were

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merely invited to the ceremony wisely saw fit not to pass the night in a mansion where such disorder reigned, but returned with the gentleman to their respective homes immediately after the disclosure."

"Did the Baron recognize the gentleman in the garden?"

"He did not; but of Hortense's identity (though a shawl, thrown loosely about her, concealed in part her figure) de Chambellas was almost satisfied. Wife, when he told me this, it seemed to me as though I could live no longer without the villain's blood. That there could exist a creature, bearing the outward form of God's great masterpiece—man—that there could live, I say, a friend base enough to break bread with me daily for weeks the while he was deliberately plotting my ruin, yours, wife, and hers, that once innocent child's, seemed a crime so base that I believed, and believe still, that shooting him down in cold blood, would be to rid the world of so treacherous a viper, that mercy-teaching heaven itself could not but look excusingly on the desperate act. I wished that night to seek him out; to go from one room to the other until a wronged father's quick eye should detect in the hesitating speech or assumed air of unconcern, the one guilty wretch. Then should his life have atoned for taking away hers—aye, more than her life, for he despoiled her of spotless character and virgin fame!"

The Count strode up and down the room as he

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spoke; at the concluding words he stopped suddenly, and raising his hand toward heaven, seemed to appeal for power to crush the man who had so wronged him. His eye was bloodshot, and his whole frame trembled with emotion. Poor wife; she could not tell him then.

"I wished to seek him out that night, but de Chambellas, who, with a father's heart, could easily place himself in my wretched position, dissuaded me from doing so. In my place, he said, he would wait patiently: a man who could lay so diabolical a plot must have trickery enough to conceal his guilt by an unconcerned and truth-seeming manner when accused. Besides, the death of a man (mayhap an innocent one) would be upon my hands. Justice would take up the affair, the particulars would transpire, and then, indeed, our name had better never have existed, for, bandied about in every creature's mouth, until worn out with the affair, the once glorious patronymic would be totally forgotten, or remembered to be made a subject of ridicule. It seemed as if every former member of the Frissac race stood before me then, having left their charnel homes, to forbid this desecration! and so I waited. It was understood that I should have the air of a totally unsuspicious man; that I should treat all the guests alike. Before long an averted eye, when mine was upon it, a shrinking of the hand, which mine so cordially pressed; these signs of an uneasy mind, with the help of heaven's

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mercy, were to point out to me the seducer. I played the hypocrite, took part in Armand's duel. I consented to wait in fact, and God help me, the next morning the traitor had fled."

He sank back, and covered his face with his hands. The wretched wife sat near him, her breast torn with a thousand agonizing passions, but fear—fear of him—the strongest of them all.

"But the vile wretch will not escape; the retribution, which, sooner or later, overtakes every creature who thus sets at nought the laws of God and man, will surely overtake him. Meanwhile I ponder and ponder, and I am convinced I have hit upon the guilty one."

She let him go on, for speak she could not.

"Yes, it can be no other. Armand has always been a dear friend, will soon be a relation. I need not mention him. Morlot I would trust as myself. Besides the Marquis and de Chambellas, but one other man slept that night beneath our roof. But one other man; for Hortense would not have deigned to cast her eyes upon any one of those three nonentities whom Lèonie, before her engagement, thought fit to constitute her *valets de chambre*. There remains but one other man, wife. You know who I mean."

In her surprise at his undiminished faith in Morlot's honour, she could not remember any other guest than those the Count had named, and so she told him.

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"Listen, then, and you will see that I am right. This man who enters your house, and cordially shakes your hand, who hoodwinks you with his honest face and outspoken manner, the while he steals away your greatest treasure, is the young Englishman, is Sydney Mortimer."

Oh Heaven, this was too much to bear! The man who she believed loved Hortense, who, obeying his honour, had stifled his feelings, and scarcely sought a word with her since her engagement, to be thus accused of the foulest crime that can blacken a man's character! Her sense of justice now bid her set aside her fears, and tell the truth. In her agony of mind, she saw the avenging father seeking out this noble-hearted Englishman, tracking his footsteps over every portion of the civilized world, till, at last, they met, and the stifled rage of months would make him act—would force him to do the fatal deed, before reason whispered there was no actual proof that this was the offender! It almost seemed as if he had divined her thoughts, for he said:

"You can now guess the object of my journey. I looked for him in every principal town of England and France. I have been to his brother's house, but he is nowhere to be found. His relations have not heard from him since he was here, his brother is much alarmed at his silence. Wife, does not this look like guilt? Does an honest man fly from all his friends and family to hide himself? But I shall find him,

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and when we meet, my vengeance will be terrible!"

The double injustice of the charge gave back to the Countess the courage which had deserted her during his wrath. "Henri," said she, "you wrong Sydney Mortimer. He is entirely innocent of the charge you make against him."

"Wife, you know the culprit; you have concealed his name for that base child's sake."

"She is not base; she is as pure as when God gave her to us to be a blessing and a joy. If there be a culprit it is I; on me let your anger fall."

He stood before her transfixed with amazement; his astonishment was so great that, for the moment, his anger was forgotten.

"Before you condemn me, Henri, hear me fully. I need not tell you that I love you; that, since that day, many years ago, when we mutually took vows, which you afterwards found you could not keep, you have been, besides that child, the only object of my affection. You could not return it, you could not love me. I do not blame you, Henri; it was, perhaps, not your fault. Others there were whose smiles and loving words became dear to you, and the poor wife and child, the two recluses in the old chateau, were almost forgotten—if remembered, thought of as troublesome, though necessary, ties. For years this continued; I prayed to God to give me strength to bear your coldness; or, if it were His gracious will

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to grant me that charm which others possessed, to lure you back to love and duty. I said this went on for years, and I believe that, during that time, no reproach ever passed my lips; that, as far as you allowed me, I performed the duties of an affectionate wife. I sought no confidant; I never poured my sorrows into the breast of even a female friend. But there was a man who knew our secrets. He *knew* them, and surely not from me. In a moment of bitter anguish, occasioned by some chilling remark from you, this man came to me. He knew what I prized above all earthly goods, your love! He promised to obtain that for me; he promised to expose the perfidy of one whom, he said, you held dear; he said he longed to bring you back into the paths of honour and duty, and that it was really more for your sake than for mine that he undertook the task. Heaven knows with what innocent joy I consented to accept his services! I had known him for years; he had ever treated me with the deepest respect; he was *your* friend, your intimate friend, and I did not doubt him. I had several interviews with him, in which he announced the progress he was making; but never, Henri, never, till after your return from Paris, when he exposed that woman's perfidy, had he spoken one word that might not have been uttered before you, or in the presence of a hundred persons. After telling me the particulars of that affair, he said something here in this room about my

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happiness in your return to me having annihilated his. The speech was, perhaps, not as plainly expressed as I have made it, but it satisfied me that I must have no more interviews with him. I was astonished and pained at his effrontery; and, had you, Henri, been a confidant, a friend to me, I should have told you of it immediately. But I dared not speak then of what I feared you would disbelieve, the perfidy of Monsieur Georges Morlot. I remained silent, but never opened my lips to him again on any subject, until the night the contract was signed. I knew nothing of that letter till I saw it in your hands —it was written by him, and was intended for me! You could not have been more surprised than myself at its contents. I never, by word, look, or deed, gave him encouragement to write to me in that passionate strain. I swear that, Henri! by the love I bear my child."

De Frissac, during the Countess's speech, showed signs of great agitation; he spoke no word, but she saw he had bitten his nether lip till the blood came. He now said bitterly, "Then, Madame, the heroine of the midnight adventure—"

"Was myself. I had sought your room, but dared not meet you in your anger. I entered the garden, not to keep a rendezvous, but to cool my fevered brain. There I saw Monsieur Morlot—there I reproached him for his unmanly conduct, nor listened to his attempt at self-exoneration on the plea

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of love. Oh, Henri! that night I felt the full bitterness of your want of regard, for when I told him I should acquaint you with his perfidy, he taunted me with your neglect and coldness." She had been firm till now, but as she said this she burst into tears.

"Marie," said her husband, standing before her, "is it true that you gave him no encouragement? Rise if you are innocent—rise, I say, if you are still worthy to bear an honourable name."

She rose with dignity, and raising her calm clear eyes to his, said proudly, "I am your true and honest wife, Count de Frissac—am, have been, and ever shall be."

With a sigh of relief he drew her to his breast and embraced her fondly. He soon knew all; how the innocent Hortense, seeing her mother's pale looks when the letter was produced, had rightly guessed there was some hidden trouble, and had generously resolved to bear the shame of it, if shame there was."

"Can you forgive, dear one," said the Count, "those long years of neglect, that period of blind folly? It is I who should sue for pardon—not you. You have ever done your duty truthfully, nobly. I alone, idiot that I was, forgot that duty I owed not only to you, dear wife, but also to that sweet daughter. Oh, how superior to me have you both proved yourselves! I long to repay your sufferings by such ardent affection as will cause you to forget the past. Pardon! dear wife, pardon!" He could say no

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more, but the warmth of his embrace proved to the Countess that at last the reward of her exemplary life was at hand; that the love she had so sighed, so prayed for, was at last her own. She felt supremely happy. Many and deep were de Frissac's imprecations on Morlot's head—that "friend of the house" should not escape him; but where to look for him? And to what cause could Mortimer's absence be attributed?

Soon after this Hortense heard a gentle tap at her door. "Enter," said she. The door opened, and her father stood before her. Her first impulse was to throw herself into his arms, but the recollection of that night came over her, and she sank into her chair again.

"Come and embrace your father, my own, my noble child."

Christmas came in two weeks, and Armand remained. It was the happiest one that Chateau Frissac had seen for many a long year.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

### EN ROUTE.

THEY were all in Paris for New Year's day. Armand had to bestir himself for the Director-Generalship, Lèonie was dull at the chateau, and the Count wished his wife and daughter to appear in society, so to Paris they all went. Of late years the de Frissacs had not kept house in the capital, therefore they all went to the Hotel du Rhin, in the Place Vendôme. This arrangement, as she privately told Armand, gave Lèonie great satisfaction.

Shortly after their arrival they called upon the Duchess de la Rocheconstant. Lèonie's heart fluttered as she ascended the grand staircase. She expected to find her future mother-in-law a stiff, pompous dame, who would treat this little parvenu, who had run away with her noble son's ducal affections, in a very off-hand manner, slightly tinctured, perhaps, with condescension. To her great surprise and intense pleasure, on entering the *salon* she found herself affectionately embraced on both cheeks by a gay,

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silver-haired, kind-looking old lady, not at all pompous, and who immediately congratulated her son on the beauty and grace of the lady of his choice.

The Countess and the Duchess had long been intimate friends, and always met when they happened to be in Paris together. Hortense was delighted to renew her childhood's acquaintance with Mademoiselle de la Rocheconstant, a lovely, amiable girl, who at present was naturally inclined to think and talk of little but that far-off diplomatic lover of hers. It was uncertain when he would return, but soon as he did they were to be married. They knew of Armand's generous intention of transferring his income to his sister on the day of her marriage, but understanding money matters indistinctly, as most ladies, do the Duchess and her daughter little imagined that Armand could not marry till he could find himself some money-making position. Lèonie of course did not enlighten them upon that subject.

They were a very merry party; not a day passed that they had not some invitation. All were delighted at the gaieties save Hortense. Her parents had remarked her preoccupied air and failing spirits, and ascribed it, with reason, to a letter received by the Count from Sydney Mortimer's brother, asking him if he had had any tidings of Sydney. Months had now elapsed since his last letter, written from Chateau Frissac. Mr. Mortimer was most uneasy; Sydney was usually a very regular correspondent. What

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seemed very singular was the fact that the day after he left Chateau Frissac he had drawn upon his banker for a sum which was not a large one, and that since they had had no news of him, and had paid no money for his account. Months had elapsed since then, and the banker had addressed a letter to Henry Mortimer, asking for information as to his brother's whereabouts. All this doubt and uncertainty had a pernicious effect upon Hortense; she drooped, grew paler and weaker, and, at last, it was determined that she must leave Paris and seek a southern climate. Nice first, and, if that did not succeed, Madeira. So after a heart-rending parting between Armand and Lèonie (the former promising to go after her the very moment the directorship should be obtained) they left Paris.

During their stay in the capital the Count had made it a point of honour, a pleasurable duty, to seek all those who had been present, or who had heard of that scene at the signing of the contract, and of the breaking off of the marriage between Hortense and the Marquis. The few persons who knew of it were overjoyed to hear the explanation of the affair. The Count had assured his daughter that the Marquis would now be only too happy to marry her; he should at once let him know that the girl they had judged unworthy to wed with him, was an angel of purity and filial affection. Hortense implored her father to do no such thing, with an earnestness which made him understand that she was no longer mistress of her

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affection. Well was it that he gave up his plan. He called upon the Marquis one morning, and found his ex-son-in-law-elect in full dress, black-coated and trousered, and brilliant with decorations and stars of every order. Precisely the same *tenue* was it, as that with which he burst upon the company the night on which he was to sign the contract of his marriage with Hortense. De Frissac, in a few words, explained to the Marquis that the letter, the cause of all the mischief, was one a man had had the impertinence to address to the Countess. Madame de Frissac, alarmed at what might be the results of this unwarrantable rashness, had fainted from nervousness and emotion at such effrontery, and Hortense had stepped forward and claimed the letter, thinking to clear her mother.

"Glad to hear it, my dear de Frissac; sorry, very sorry it should have happened that night, for I should have been married before this time and the affair ended. By-the-bye, I will soon be married unless some extraordinary event occurs once more to prevent it."

"Married, Marquis."

"Oh, yes; ah, you know the lady, the future Marquise de Claremont Brezè. I met her at your house, that pretty, quiet Mademoiselle de Chambellas."

"Marquis, I give you joy; an excellent young girl, and a most dutiful daughter: she will make you a good wife."

"Yes, I think I shall like her. Not so handsome



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as Mademoiselle Hortense, you know. I hope I shall be able, by degrees, to instil a little more animation into her. Shē is *so* silent now."

"Never fear, Marquis, Paris is a capital place to teach a young girl, suddenly become a wife, that she is transformed; that she has become free as air, that—"

"Hum, hum; diable, how you rattle on, de Frissac. I shall take care to keep the Marquise from hearing such statements as those. Why, we shall become steady, you know: 'tis time, eh, Count?"

The Count, as he looked at this old man, satiated with the pleasures of the world, who was, with the unbounded selfishness of such favourites of fortune, about to link to his almost finished existence, that opening bud, that fresh young life, thought that it was indeed time for *him* to become settled; but he heaved a sigh as he reflected on her fate; yet, and as this thought entered his mind he reddened, and sprang to his feet, he had been upon the point of giving to this old man his Hortense, his only child. Ashamed, and angry with himself, he saluted the Marquis, and retired.

Awakened from that bad dream in which he had been floundering away the best part of his life, the Count's nobler sentiments assumed the sway, and now that a true, a holy love filled his heart, it was incapable of, and abhorred, a mean action. Having gone to see all the persons who were to be set aright, re-

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garding that unfortunate night, having performed all his duties, the Count was happy, and entered the hotel in a gayer mood than when he had left it. He found Armand waiting for Lèonie.

"Ah, Duke, I wished to speak with you."

"Yes? what is it, de Frissac?"

There was the rub. The Count had something to say; but he did not know how to begin. He was a man who detested circumlocution, and so said, after a moment's pause: "De la Rocheconstant, you wish to marry; it is certainly not the fault of the lady that the happy event does not take place immediately. Now, I think, it can be arranged."

"De Frissac," said Armand, interrupting him, "you've got the Rogueship for me—I know you have."

"No, my dear young friend, there's the trouble, the Rogueship, as you very aptly call it, is very difficult to obtain. How can a man, with your name, consent to become Director of a railway, or of some bank, both, more than likely, gotten up with a view to cheating the public. No, no, that will not do."

"Then, what is your scheme?" said Armand, rather less buoyant than before.

"In the first place, you must have a secret from your wife."

Armand rubbed his nose with his stick, and looked as though he thought that would be difficult.

"Without," continued de Frissac, "without wil-

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fully deceiving her, she may be made to suppose that the Director-Generalship is obtained, a very easy post, almost a sinecure, allows you travel about, &c. Every three months you draw a draft for salary."

"On Messrs. Nobody & Co., who dishonour it," said Armand.

"On Laffittes, who pay it."

The Duke grasped the Count's hand, warmly thanked him, but shook his head in sign of dissent.

"If I can't be under obligations to my wife, I surely cannot be to a friend."

"You can pay me back when you please."

"I would rather not incur the debt, my friend. We are both young, Lèonie and myself, and can wait until I am prepared."

At this moment the lady in question appeared; de Frissac withdrew, to allow them to have their parting interview alone. The next day they left Paris. At Nice they were hardly less gay than in the capital. A dozen or so members of the *crême de la crême* of the Russian aristocracy were there, whose salons were always open. Our party was invited everywhere; but they soon found that the gaiety was telling on Hortense's health, so they resolved to accept no invitations which would keep her up beyond a certain hour. This was hard on Lèonie, who, in spite of Armand's absence, was as gay as ever, and quite as ready to go to balls and soirées. Sometimes the Count and Countess, at Hortense's request, would es-

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cort Lèonie, leaving their daughter at home. When this took place, Hortense, accompanied by Miss Staybrook and a man servant, would stroll about the town, with a light shawl wrapped loosely about her. It was now the (with us) dreaded month of February, but in that favoured spot the air was warm and balmy, the flowers in full bloom; the country, in fact, had the appearance of spring. Had it been an ill of the body that was bearing upon Hortense, she would, doubtless, have recovered soon in this lovely climate, where the winds of heaven are averted, as if in pity of the poor invalids there assembled; but what could climate or science do for the frail form, when that cankerous grief was preying upon her heart. No news of Sydney. Armand had written everywhere. English consuls on the continent had been applied to for information regarding him. No one knew any thing of his whereabouts.

One horrid fear constantly haunted Hortense's mind; and yet that fear implied that he loved her above all earthly things; of this she was not—could not be sure. Could her disgrace have produced such an effect upon him that, in a moment of anguish, he had *destroyed* himself? That thought was ever present to her. She could not rid herself of it. In vain she took soporifics. Can sleep approach while the agitated mind chases away its gentle influence by wild and fitful imaginings? The physician at Nice saw that the mind was diseased and that the body

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suffered in consequence. He was honest enough to tell this to the Count, assuring him at the same time that nothing but change of scene and healthful pleasures of every kind could relieve her. She must have amusement; that agreeable remedy we all require, but which is so difficult to obtain. So they made their preparations for departure, and decided that Rome should be the first place visited; they would be there in time for the Carnival. Before they left Nice, besides the ordinary friendly and business correspondence of so large a party, there was one letter written and one received. The one written, was penned by the fair hand of Lèonie, in which she gracefully declined an offer of marriage, made to her by the distinguished Polish exile, Count Sneezetoujoursky. The virtues, accomplishments, and delightful conversation of this noble victim of political tyranny, had formed the theme of many a letter to her betrothed, her ecstasies driving the unfortunate Armand nearly mad with jealousy.

The letter received was for the Count de Frissac, and was signed Georges Morlot! The husband, wife, and daughter read this in private family council. All three were painfully agitated, as the Count broke the seal. The letter was dated Marseilles; it was more in the form of a written confession than a letter, as it dispensed with all complimentary appellatives at its beginning. It was a plain recital of the whole unfortunate affair. The writer truthfully exonerated

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Madame de Frissac from all blame, denounced himself as the sole offender, and pleaded, in excuse, a love born the first day he saw the Countess; a passion that had increased instead of diminishing. In a moment of delirium he had written that letter—not wishing to trust it to a servant, he had himself placed it in her portfolio, where, he imagined, no eye but those of the Countess would ever see it. He begged pardon for the cutting words he had spoken that night in the garden. He told de Frissac that, as an injured husband, he had just cause to despise this false friend, but that "never more shall you be offended by seeing me. I quit my native land, never again to return. Forget and forgive me, and may God bless you all." In spite of the wrath which de Frissac entertained against the writer, he was touched at the letter. "After all," said he, embracing his wife and daughter, "I should forgive him, for to him I owe my present happiness."

They examined the envelope, and found that Morlot's letter had gone first to the chateau, then to Paris, before its arrival here. It was nearly a month old. He must now indeed be far away. "He committed a fault, in allowing himself to entertain a warmer feeling than friendship for the wife of another man. He has met his punishment. Strange destiny." Morlot's fate was now no longer a mystery, but where was Sydney?

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### ROME.

THE first aspect of Rome is not pleasing, even to the art traveller. A vast plain, desolated by malaria, which ruthlessly decimates the few creatures that misery had respected, is now all that remains of Virgil's Latium. The lonely buffalo roams undisturbed, and browses tranquilly on the very spot where once stood the gorgeous villas of Lucullus and of Horace. Not always honoured by the presence of these pleasure seekers 'tis true, but 'twas here, beneath wide-spreading trees, in gardens odoriferous with sweet flowers, here they came to dream away the enchanted hours with sweet thoughts of poetry and love.

Republican Rome, and Rome of the Emperors, have vanished! Time, the slow destroyer, and War, the speedy one, have encumbered with ruins the city, which in spite of all, still sits so proudly on her seven hills. Temples, palaces, triumphal arches, columns and statues, lie mingled in inextricable con-

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fusion; the plough-share has dispersed to the winds the bones of those immortal warriors, whose deeds of glory were so great, the recital of them even at this distant day, stirs the blood with enthusiasm. Amongst the few monuments which have resisted the ravages of invasion and braved the injuries of time, the few rare piles still perfect amongst this universal *debris*, is the Pantheon. The Romans will tell you that this is not strange; an Emperor dedicated the temple to all the Gods, a Pope to all the Saints, and therefore it shall never crumble! A feeling of inexpressible awe comes over us at the first view of the Eternal City. It is an almost oppressive sense of the grandeur that reigns supreme and never ending. Years, war, barbarism, have been powerless to change it. From the Forum to the Pantheon, from the temple of Vesta to the Colosseum, from the Vatican to the Capitol, one breathes a changeless atmosphere of art. History is written for us in bas-relief—the lives of great men are unveiled to us, not in the words from Plutarch's pen, but under the ideal forms that Grecian statuary gave them. There they stand, white and motionless in their still beauty; to use the expression of a poet, a dead people of the past mingling with the live generation of the present day. In the midst of this mass of bath houses destroyed by fire, of crumbling palaces, of amphitheatres half gone, have risen obelisks, statues, columns—themselves now but the poor semblance of what they were in their



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lurid glare which your lamp gives out; where all is silence except when broken by the harsh voice of the cicerone drawling out, with oft-repeated *nonchalance*, the name and history of the silent occupant of the cell towards which he points. Hortense had become sombre in all her ideas; her mind had taken a melancholy shade; for hours after her return from these visits, would she sit musing on the wonders she had seen. With these gloomy thoughts, the absent Sydney was always mingled.

Since the Count's visit to Mortimer Hall, he had received several letters from Henry Mortimer, always on the subject of Sydney; had the de Frissacs received any tidings of him? Nothing, and while in Rome the Count was pained at receiving a letter, written by a secretary, announcing the serious illness of Henry Mortimer, whose desire to know the whereabouts of his brother had grown almost to a frenzy. This it was deemed advisable to keep from Hortense, as any mention of Sydney's or his brother's name, seemed to produce a painful impression on her.

The carnival was now in all its glory, and the Count determined to plunge into its pleasures for the purpose of diverting Hortense's mind. Unfortunately well-bred people have extreme difficulty in accomplishing this. For what pleasure exists to a delicate mind in throwing chalk bonbons from a balcony or out of a carriage window, at dirty, shabbily costumed male and female canaille? The days are past when

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admired (as Armand wished her to be) from afar. Weeks passed on thus—for there is an attraction about the Eternal City that grows as it feeds. The more the eye becomes habituated to the prominent works of art, the better it appreciates those small exquisite things which abound in Rome, and which are neglected by the casual visitor. The party (like all travellers) were horribly bored by the papal policemen and the French soldiers. Prying, peering, offensively smelling creatures, who seem to think that they are showing zeal by watching your every footstep. Let us hope that ere long this nuisance of the French soldiery at Rome may cease. The Pope's Swiss guard amused Lèonie vastly; she wrote to Armand that his Holiness must have had them direct from the stage of the Opera Comique, in Paris. The Henri the Second costume of the guards led to this profound discovery of hers. After the carnival the weather became rather warm, and the Count suggested their taking flight again. Hortense became violently agitated when he made this proposal, and implored that they should remain, with such heart-felt earnestness, that her parents at once acceded. The Count hired a villa in the environs, a habitation five times larger than they required, but which was let, like all houses in or about Rome during the warm season, at a very moderate price. There was a magnificent garden at the back; the air was heavy with songs of birds and the perfume of flowers; there was fruit, too, in

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abundance—all this was enclosed by a low wall, on which the green and shining lizard briskly whisked his length along, or lay dormant in the hot rays of the noonday sun. A faint hope of meeting Sydney Mortimer kept Hortense in Rome; often and often had he spoken to her of his intention of visiting the city of the arts. He was a great lover of ancient art, and though he would not believe it himself, had power with his pencil, and was an unusually good colourist. Was it not likely that he, disgusted with the world, had come here to perfect himself in an art, which to the real lover of it, is a world in itself. Here she would remain—living in the country, but being in town every day or two. Her father willingly humoured her every whim; leaving the Countess and Lèonie to amuse themselves in the vast country house, the father and daughter often betook themselves to town. In one of these trips the Count seeing a number of cameos in a window, had the happy idea of having Hortense's cut. This brought them into Rome almost every day. After the sitting, the pair would wander silently through the streets until the setting of the sun warned Hortense 'twas time to return to the country. In one of Armand's letters to Lèonie, in speaking with wonder at Sydney's non-appearance, he confided to his bethrothed, the declaration of love for Hortense which the young Englishman had made to him. That he had spoken of her monstrous conduct (as he considered it) in

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terms which plainly showed she was dear to him. In Armand's last interview with him, Sydney had said that now she was unworthy even of respect, he felt no pleasure in life—the ideal of female physical and mental loveliness which he had formed for himself, was gone. Lèonie had read this letter to the Count and Countess, and it was agreed that its contents had better be kept from Hortense. Lèonie knew it was unwise to let her see it, but one day when sitting alone with her kinswoman, after she had vainly endeavoured for an hour to keep up a conversation with Hortense, and rouse her from her apathy, she produced the letter. "Better shock the nerves," reasoned Lèonie, "than let her continue in that state of mental dejection."

But she was wrong—there was a shock, and then followed a relapse into a dejection impossible to describe. He had loved her and thought her unworthy of his love. She expected that, but this absence—this silence—if any thing fearful had occurred, was she not indirectly responsible for the rash step? That thought was too frightful to entertain. But what was this inexplicable voice that always whispered he was in Rome? He was here, here! And she would not leave the spot, not be frightened away by the malaria—not even the horrors of a simoon itself could have stirred her purpose, had the desert have chosen to waft its destruction to the seven-hilled capital. She thought not of the danger incurred by her parents

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and Lèonie; grief is always more or less selfish, and the poor child was severely tried. Every day, though the sun was hot even in the early morning, would the father and child go forth. There was real danger now; all strangers had fled, none remained but the acclimated inhabitants. Sometimes in their lonely wanderings would they come upon a stricken being, clad in rags, gasping for breath, groaning with pain, and scorching with thirst, lying under some marble archway, or haply at the foot of a virgin-topped cross. Money could do the poor wretches no good, their kind shunned them, as of old the tainted pariah was left to die, to rot, unnoticed and uncared for. The father hoped these scenes of misery would shock the girl—perhaps frighten her. But no; her countenance changed 'tis true, she bestowed a blessing and a prayer on the stricken creature, and passed on, calmly absorbed with her fixed idea. Her eyes were ever wandering about with a quick, eager, questioning glance—sometimes flashing with hope, which invariably faded away, as the person they were fixed upon neared her.

"When is this pilgrimage to end, Hortense?" said the Count.

"When I have found him and told him that I am innocent."

The cameo was done, and was an excellent likeness. While her father was paying the small sum asked for this real work of art, Hortense strolled to

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the door of the shop, and was walking up and down the almost deserted street. The shades of evening were falling. She had after her last sitting taken her accustomed walk with her father, and returned for the now completed cameo. They had waited some time for it, so it was almost dark; as she stood there at the door, one or two stragglers passed by; she peered into their faces, then turned away with a disappointed air. Presently a dark shadow fell upon the pavement opposite. A tall thin figure, with a slouched hat, passed quietly and was gone. She could not speak. It was he! She could not be mistaken. This was why something had told her not to quit Rome.

"Father, father," she said, "come quickly."

"Yes, dear," and he took the change from the bowing artist.

"Come, oh come!" He was at her side in a moment.

"What is it, my child?"

"Father, I have seen him—Sydney Mortimer."

"Which way did he go?"

"This way—give me your arm—be quick."

Their pace was more like a run than a walk, as they took the direction in which the figure had passed. On, on they went through the silent and deserted streets; at last they caught a glimpse of the man as he turned a corner, and de Frissac saw Sydney—meanly clothed, and having altogether an appearance

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of poverty, but still Sydney. To overtake him was impossible; he was far in advance of his pursuers, and was lighter footed than either. Their unusual pace and excited looks gained for the de Frissacs a special *surveillance* of the police; there was something suspicious in such conduct. With bended head, and hands deep in his pockets, the young man, now in advance of them only about a hundred yards, walked hastily on till he reached a dark street, in one of the poorest quarters of the town, a street in which the pestilence had been busy—the air was heavy with its noxious breath. They saw him enter a house, which they approached as he disappeared. They found there were two large houses, very poor looking tenements standing together in an isolated position, and built exactly alike. They were not certain which house he had entered, so they applied at both. It is a difficult matter in Rome to get any information about the lodgers of a house. No well-lodged *concierge* there to answer your questions—impertinently perhaps, but still he is obliged to answer them. At the first house they found a dirty man sitting near the door, eating a mess, of which macaroni formed the principal ingredient.

"Does a Monsieur Sydney Mortimer live here?" asked de Frissac, in very tolerable Italian.

The man said he had never heard the name to his knowledge.

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"A tall young Englishman," and the Count described his appearance.

The man said he believed a person corresponding to that description lived at the next house. For his civility de Frissac threw the dirty man a scudi. He caught it before it fell, and clearing his mouth of the macaroni which encumbered it, poured forth a number of unintelligible blessings on the head of the donor. They proceeded to the next house, where they were for a time unsuccessful in their attempt to find any one to give information. The Count looked everywhere, but found nobody—called aloud, but was unanswered — until a child opening a door at the back of the courtyard, disclosed to view a woman leaning over a wash tub. Although she was little better than a servant, perhaps a working man's wife, de Frissac, as he approached her, lifted his hat with that innate politeness, so far, at least, as outward forms are concerned, which characterizes Frenchmen.

"Does a young Englishman live here—a Monsieur Sydney Mortimer?" said he, trying to Italianize the name.

"Not in my room, you may be sure of that," said the woman with an impudent laugh.

"Do you know, my good woman," said the Count in a conciliatory tone, "whether a gentleman of this appearance (he again described Sydney) is a lodger in this house?"

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"I don't know any thing about it—it's not my business to spy upon the lodgers."

Was there any one who could tell them any thing about the persons in the house? She thought not. This was not encouraging. They could find no one who had heard the name or knew of Sydney's appearance.

"Let us leave it till to-morrow, dear. Even if he lived here I could not call upon him with you, so late in the evening; nor could I leave you here alone while I went up stairs to see him. Let us leave it till to-morrow."

With a heavy heart she consented—her hopes had been so raised by the sudden apparition, that she almost feared in twelve or fourteen hours he would be gone again. They took the number of the house into which they thought he had entered, and the name of the street, and then returned to the villa in the country, to impart their tidings to the two dear ones, already uneasy at their unusual stay.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### A VISION.

Hortense was induced to remain at home the next day. The Count was to make the voyage of discovery alone, and had given a solemn promise to his child, that he would try to induce Mortimer to return to the villa with him. If he failed in this, all she desired was, that the truth should be made known to the young man, who, if he now no longer loved her, had once done so. De Frissac proceeded at once to the house, the number of which he had taken the day before; he took the precaution, however, of getting the dirty man to whom he had given money to accompany him next door, for the purpose of eliciting information about Sydney. After several knocks at sundry doors, Giacomo succeeded in arousing a friend who happened, singularly enough, to be engaged in the same process of disposing of a large platter of macaroni. His fellow told him that the gentleman wished to know if any Englishman lived there—a Monsieur Mortimer. Then followed his description.

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The macaroni cater shook his head. There was not a single Englishman in the house, and he had never heard the name before. It never occurred to de Frissac, that Mortimer might be passing under an assumed name in Rome.

"I tell you I saw him enter this house last night."

Still the same answer. No one of that name in the house. No Englishman of any name there. This was bad news. The Count turned away. A thought struck him. Might not the man, the sort of apology for a *concierge*, have been bribed to secrecy by Sydney, who evidently wished to avoid being discovered. De Frissac resolved to go to the police—they knew every thing and everybody. This looked something like indelicacy on the Count's part, but he had an excuse. A few days before he had got a second letter from Squire Mortimer's secretary, announcing the now alarming state of the Squire's health. The Count felt Sydney should know this, and he determined to use every means in his power to discover his retreat.

At the Prefecture he met with cordial coöperation, those cocked-hat gentlemen (the Count had applied to the French police, he knew too well the inefficiency of the Papal police to meddle with it) rather like mysterious researches after suspicious hidden people; so when the Count asked them if they knew any thing about a Mr. Sydney Mortimer, and then gave his oft-repeated description, the face of the higher functionary grew radiant as he said:

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"Yes, we know him of old; never knew him to go by that name, however; but he doesn't mind changing, it appears. Frank, open countenance, you say?"

"Yes," said the Count.

"Well, there he is!" said he of the police, producing the photograph of a well-known London thief, whose peculations in Rome, whither he emigrated for the good of his health and to avoid the too urgent civilities of the Metropolitan Brigade, had come to a sudden stop as they laid violent hands upon him, and furnished him with cool, but close, quarters in that great ugly Roman prison.

The Count could but laugh heartily at this ludicrous mistake.

"I must assure you that the person I am seeking is a gentleman, a friend of mine, and quite unlike this person. Have you no one of that name entered among the passport *visas?*"

Search was made by the somewhat crest-fallen policeman, but no such name was registered.

"Well, then, I suppose I must have been mistaken when I thought I saw him," said the Count sadly.

The sly official, who had so readily produced the photograph, here insinuated that the friend of *Monsieur le Conte*, although a *gentleman*, might have seen fit to change his name, and take an assumed one. This was possible, nay, even likely, the Count thought,

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for if Sydney's desire for concealment was so great that he had ceased all correspondence even with his brother, might it not have led him to drop the well-known name? He had, perhaps, taken an Italian one —if so, there was little chance of hearing of him at the police-office.

"If you will be kind enough to give me the names of all the English down on your list, I will try to find him."

"It is very likely he has changed his name," said the man, grinning—"the English are so eccentric."

The English on the list were only to the number of three; the first breath of hot weather with its attendant fever had driven them all away. The policeman knew of several English artists who regularly took studios out of Rome for the summer; but these were men of note whom it was impossible to confound with Sydney. The names of the three were, the Hon. Mr. Snead, Mr. Totson, who had his family with him, and, of course, a Mr. Smith. He wrote it Smythe; but stern justice took no note of such disingenuous *detours*, of such evident desire to escape from that large and comprehensive family whose branches spread all over the world, but wrote *Smith* in the passport register. The Count took the addresses and proceeded on his voyage of discovery.

Mr. Snead lived in a large handsome house, the first floor of which was devoted entirely to his use. De Frissac's knock was immediately answered by a

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well-dressed servant, unmistakably English, who desired the gentleman to be seated while he announced his arrival to his master. The drawing-room was large and handsomely furnished with an agreeable mixture of Roman works of art and comfortable English furniture. Many valuable paintings hung upon the wall; between an exquisite Leonardo da Vinci and a rough sketch by a rising Roman artist was an English engraving of the last winner of the Derby. There were numberless pipes, but few books. Before the Count had taken in all these details the doors opened and a handsome but rather effeminate-looking young man entered—an Englishman—but not Sydney. The Count immediately rose, apologized for the intrusion, and explained the nature of his call.

"Mr. Sydney Mortimer is dooced lucky," drawled out the master of the house, "in having such kind friends. I might be lost and never turn up again, and I don't think any one would care much; the governor would be rather glad, I imagine, as he believes I cost him more than I am worth. Heartless parent! I really believe he contemplates letting me take the fever in this abominable place before he sends me a penny to get me out of it."

The Count said he believed the epidemic was abating, and so left the Hon. Mr. Snead.

The next person on the list bore an unprophetic name, Totson—that was certainly not the patronymic



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which a young misanthrope would have chosen to conceal himself from the world. Totson did not sound cheering, but de Frissac resolved to leave no stone unturned. So he soon found himself in the court-yard of one of the most comfortable houses, in one of most comfortable streets of Rome.

Mr. Totson lived on the second floor back. Monsieur de Frissac knew that his passport said he had a family with him, but he had supposed that that might have been a ruse of Sydney's to defeat observation; persons looking for a young bachelor would never think to call upon "Mr. Totson and family." De Frissac rang, and was at once admitted into the sitting-room, which, for the nonce, was converted into a dining-hall, all the Totsons being gathered at that moment round a large table at luncheon—all the Totsons, father, mother, seven children, a maiden aunt, and a lap-dog! One glance showed the Count that he should hear no tidings of the missing one. He soon made his excuse for the interruption; explained the nature of it, and was about to withdraw. The Totsons wanted to hear full particulars of the strange story. Was Sydney any relation to Lord Mortimer? What made him run away? and was not he altogether a very singular person?

The maiden aunt knew that Lord Mortimer had once been in a private Lunatic Asylum, and was it not likely—

The Count interrupted by saying, "he did not

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believe the Mortimers, of Mortimer Hall, where in any way related to Lord Mortimer."

The hospitable, but rather inquisitive Totsons, begged the Count to partake of some luncheon with them. This, however, he declined. The conversation had been carried on, partly in English, which language the Count spoke well, and partly in French, which language the Totsons spoke abominably.

"Frang-cais, I presume," said the inquisitive Mr. Totson.

"Oui, Monsieur," said the Count.

"And looking after an Anglay—strange! Ong affaire d'argang, I suppose," said the Briton, inquiringly.

"Non, Monsieur," and that is all they could get out of the Count, who now took his leave rather disgusted with the Totsons.

"Nasty toadeater," said Miss Jane, the ancient aunt. "I should *rather* think his friend was *not* a connection of Lord Mortimer's, indeed."

The affair formed an interesting topic of conversation for the worthy Totsons for months, though Monsieur de Frissac soon forgot them.

Mr. Smith, or Smythe, was the last of the trio. The Count had heard that this person was an English artist, and that he had been only a few months in Rome. There seemed in this some resemblance to the history of Sydney: so with high hope the Count mounted the interminable flight of steps which led to

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the studio of the painter. Arrived at the last landing place, he knocked—the door flew instantly open—this had rather a startling effect; it seemed as if some one had been lying in ambush to perform this "open sesame" arrangement. A tall, long-haired, weird-looking man, dressed in clothes far too short for him, stood there, and in reply to the Count's question, "Was Mr. Smith within?" said in a rhapsodical tone, "What a head for my Coriolanus!"

"Is it Mr. Smith—I beg pardon, Mr. Smythe—I have the pleasure of—"

"Yes," said the artist, gazing fixedly at the visitor, while he rubbed his brush into different paints distributed over his pallette.

"I beg your pardon. I had a friend whom I thought lived here. I am mistaken, I see. I will not disturb you any longer."

"Disturb me—quite the contrary—turn the head a little to the right—slight expression of grief on the features—Coriolanus to a T. I thank you, gentle sir—I thank you. For weeks have I been in search of a model for my hero; your visit was providential—your face has given me an idea—your hand, my friend, I thank you from my soul."

They shook hands. Monsieur de Frissac was not sorry to depart, as he began to fear that Mr. Smith was troubled with Lord Mortimer's malady. Once in the street, he reflected with sorrow on the utter failure of his mission. How should he tell Hortense that,

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even with the assistance of the police, he had been unsuccessful in discovering the man whom they had tracked almost to his own door! The Count walked on, hardly knowing where to go, until he came to the Capitol: it was open and he went in. Looking at pictures and statues often fatigues, but sometimes it has the contrary effect and soothes the tired imagination. De Frissac seated himself on a bench and looked round, more, however, on the visitors than at the pictures. It was so different now to the gay season; in the winter the galleries are always filled with a well-dressed, unappreciative crowd, principally English. Now there were a few artists copying, four or five small groups of Romans of the better class, and a few French soldiers. It is always a matter of curiosity when we see an artist making a copy of a celebrated work, to know if that copy is a good one. This feeling it was, no doubt, which prompted the Count to look over the shoulder of a young man who was sitting near him; this is taken rather as a compliment than otherwise, by the Romans.

"That is a fine head," said the Count.

"Yes; it is Pope Gregory. I am copying it, as you see, from the one hanging up there. I want to have the likeness, so that I can introduce it into an original picture of my own. It is a well-worn subject; you must know it well—when he says, *non Angli sed angeli* (not English but angels). I hope to make something pretty out of it, however. I'm dread-

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fully in want of an English female head. I've got a sketch for the boy. Just the thing, is it not?" said the artist, taking a rough crayon sketch from his portfolio.

The Count looked at it, and uttered an exclamation of pleasure. *It was a sketch of the person he had been seeking.*

"Tell me," he asked, hurriedly, "this is from nature, is it not? Who is the original?"

"A young artist here; I don't know his name. He sat to oblige me."

"He is English, is he not?"

"I don't know. He is not Italian. He has the English type of feature. Fine head, is it not?" and he held it up admiringly.

"Can you tell me where he lives?" asked de Frissac, eagerly.

The man named the street—the very house to which the Count had gone twice, each time without success. He thanked the artist, and left the gallery.

He did not attempt to find Mortimer that day. It was now past the dinner-hour, and there was still that long drive between Rome and the villa. He started home immediately, told the story of his three disappointments, which of course enhanced the value of his final discovery.

Hortense came into town the next day with her father. They drove directly to the house in the dirty deserted street, and again found the matron over her

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washtub. She had heard of the Count's liberality to the men, and now came rushing forward with very different mien to that with which she had greeted them on their former visit.

"Oh, sir," said she, "I did not know it was Mr. Harvey you were looking for the other day. He lives here; yes, sir; on the fifth floor—quite next the roof."

The Count gave her some money for her tardy information, and they went up stairs. Sydney had, then, assumed the name of Harvey. What, more stairs! Up, up, up to the topmost story of this miserable old house, up a dirty, unsteady flight of steps, which threatened at every minute to crumble beneath the weight of those foolhardy enough to ascend them.

At last they reached the last landing-place. There was a small square of glass, which gave a gleam of uncertain light on the staircase here, and this was darkened by the shadows of three large pigeons, who evidently inhabited the roof. They looked upon the new comers as intruders probably, for they instantly began a disagreeable cawing and flying about. A low, narrow door was on the left, and nailed upon it was a card, bearing the printed letters, "A. HARVEY, JUNIOR."

Hortense was so agitated, she secretly wished she had not come. It was too late now, for the Count had knocked. The door was opened by a great

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brawny Italian woman, whose features, though heavy and large, were not entirely unhandsome. She was a cross between the peasant and the tradeswoman of the town, her costume partaking of what was most coquettish in the two. The smooth bands of her luxuriant black hair covered a forehead far too square to be handsome. Her eyes were large and well formed, but their expression was disagreeable, being severe almost to fierceness. She surveyed the visitors deliberately from head to foot, and then said, in the language of the low Italians:

"What do you want?"

"Is your master at home?" asked the Count.

"Master!" said the woman, in a low tone; "he is not my master." Her eyes flashed, and she looked at Hortense with an almost fiendish expression of ill-will.

"Well, then, is your—"

"*Mio sposo*," said the woman doggedly.

Hortense felt giddy at this announcement, and seizing her father's arm, begged him to be gone. Had she found Sydney for this? Married, and to such a creature!

The Count knew the world better, so he said:

"My good woman, if Mr. Harvey is in, we beg you to tell him directly that a gentleman and his daughter wish to see him; if he is not at home, we will wait for him, or return."

"Come in," said she, as if she saw no help for it.

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They entered, and saw several pictures lying about. The room was miserable, and denoted poverty, but, strange to say, it was clean. Hortense saw nothing she knew of Sydney's; the pictures there announced a bolder and more experienced hand, but not so delicate a touch.

They seated themselves in silence.

"He'll be in, in a few minutes," said the woman.

Hortense looked at the pigeons, who returned the compliment. They were evidently not used to visitors in Mr. Harvey's studio, and considered this no doubt an innovation too hard to be borne. They cawed, flew up to the window, and then off, with signs of entire disapprobation.

"Do you come to him to get him to paint a picture?" asked the Italian, in no polite tone.

"No," said the Count.

"Ah!" she said, sneeringly, "you come to get him to marry *her*, with her white face."

"How is that possible, since he is married to you?"

The woman bit her lip, but said nothing.

In a few minutes they heard a step on the stairs; a light foot evidently, for, unfatigued by the long staircase, he was taking three or four steps at a time. The door flew open, and the young man with the slouched hat stood before them. The most extraordinary likeness to Sydney in the world, and yet how different! Coarse features, while Sydney's were fine;



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a sallow complexion, while Sydney's was rosy and healthful; hair of a different shade, and small eyes, that glanced around with an inquisitive expression, while Sydney's were large, open, and truthful. And yet the *ensemble* was striking. The features were of the same shape, the height and width of shoulders about the same. It was not extraordinary that in the twilight the Count and his daughter had been mistaken.

The young man looked rather surprised at the visitors, bowed to them courteously, however, and then, turning to the woman, said, in Italian, more fluent than elegant:

"Leave the room, Lina."

The woman sullenly obeyed, casting a look of stifled rage at Hortense, which the latter often remembered with terror after.

The Count soon explained the object of their visit. The striking resemblance of Mr. Harvey to a friend had induced them thus uninvited to penetrate to the young painter's abode.

He was only too happy to receive them, he said. He was an American, who had found his way to Rome to study his art.

With the usual compliments the de Frissacs took their departure. As they descended the stairs Hortense said:

"The young man seemed quite gentlemanly, but how terrible his wife is; so much older than her husband, too."

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"Yes," said the Count; "a strange couple!"

The girl's heart sank at this new disappointment. She had persuaded herself into believing that Sydney was in Rome, and then imagined she had had a presentiment to that effect. The truth was, she had seen the young American once before; but it was in a crowd, and as he instantly disappeared, she looked upon it as a sort of waking vision. When he passed the cameo shop, she believed her presentiment was realized, and that this time it was Sydney and not his spectre, she had seen.

After this visit, Rome and its environs became insupportable to her. After due deliberation it was agreed they should return to France, and spend some weeks at Biarritz, near Bayonne. Hortense had never visited the portion of country in which that sea bathing-place is situated. Its proximity to the mountainous ranges that separate France from Spain promised well for the long solitary rambles she delighted in.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

### A SOLDIER'S GRAVE IS THE BATTLE FIELD.

Our travellers reached Bayonne in the evening. They made but a short stay there. The town, though romantic in its aspect, and situated amid valleys green and luxuriant, only the more attractive from the contrast with those miles upon miles of sand, and pines small and stunted, called les Landes, which must be passed through to get from Bordeaux to Bayonne, seemed but dull and uninteresting to the Count and party. They had been seeing so many places lately, that all taste for the picturesque or the romantic was blunted; added to which, the anxiety caused by the state of Hortense's health gave them but little leisure for observation.

A half hour's ride brought them to Biarritz, and here they looked about them with more animation. The place was to be their home for some months to come, and they naturally gazed about them with curiosity.

The now celebrated bathing-place of Biarritz is situated on each side of a bold rocky cliff that extends

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into the sea. On all sides of the town the cliffs rise high and bare. Climbing to their tops, one gets a beautiful view. Out as far as the eye can reach stretches the unbounded sea, while behind, in the distance, the Pyrenees tower black and gloomy up to the clouds. To the left, as one gazes towards the sea, the coast of Spain and the Basques rise and lower in the horizon. Between the town and those cloud-capped frowning mountains are lesser mounts, covered with masses of foliage, with green forests, with here and there a white house peeping out, adding life and animation to the scene.

All this our travellers saw, and, as they felt the invigorating sea-breeze, it was at once decided that Biarritz was a capital place, and that they had pitched their tent in a pleasant spot.

For some days a marked improvement was visible in the state of Hortense's health. The novelty of the scene, the animation of the bathers, their gaiety, the activity of all around her, drew her attention away for the moment, and that brief respite to her diseased mind, rendered her step more firm, her eye more bright. This was noticed with joy by her parents and Lèonie; with revived hopes they redoubled their efforts to distract her mind. She took sea baths, and the effect was beneficial. So much so, that riding and driving were added to her pastimes. She submitted to her parents' wishes, even so far as to remain in the drawing-room when visitors came, and it was

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evident she was making every effort to overcome her melancholy. But, mingled with her regret at having parted forever with Mortimer was a sentiment of wounded pride, of agony. Not only could he not love her, she felt that he must despise her, believing her unworthy his esteem. Hortense felt that, as time passed, her love for the young Englishman grew stronger and stronger, spite of her efforts to the contrary; his image was ever before her eyes—that look of sorrow, of deep pain, the last look he had thrown upon her, had taught her she was loved but too well, and judging him by herself, she imagined him wandering over the world grieved beyond the power of consolation, unhappy and alone. She never for one moment doubted that he loved her; she felt sure of it, and could but attribute his sudden and unaccounted for absence, to his despair at believing her unworthy. A morbid feeling of self-accusation had overcome her, and do as she might, she could not rid herself of the painful conviction that she had thrown over his existence a pall of misery and despair. Sensitive and loving the thought was killing her, her strenuous efforts to cast it out of her mind were ineffectual, and just as her parents began to hope that health and strength were being daily recovered by her, the struggle ceased, and she gave way once more to that silent despairing grief which had so terrified them during their stay in Rome.

During the short interval when she had seemed so

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much better, the Count eagerly seized upon any opportunity that offered to afford them amusement. Excursions to the many romantic caves and grottos in the mountains were made, while visits to the theatre of Bayonne were frequent. To say that Hortense enjoyed these excursions and other amusements, would be untrue; she suffered them, and endeavoured to persuade her parents she enjoyed them; but though the Count and Lèonie might have thought so, the anxious mother was not deceived. *She* was not astonished when at last the poor child gave up her attempt to seem cheerful, and fell again into a state of despondency.

Poor Lèonie, all this care and grief was hard upon her. She still kept up those seemingly never-to-be-subdued good spirits, but in reality she was unhappy. Armand was away from her. His search after that position which was to enable them to wed was a hard one. Now-a-days the world is getting to be so democratic, so earnest in its worship of gold, that title and rank must take second place in public estimation. Names are something to be sure, titles still cause a sensation, as Mrs. Smith or Mrs. Brown will admit; for what won't they do to have a lord, any lord, to grace their conversaziones with his presence; but those wretches on 'change have no respect for titles, care for no lords who are not gilt edged, and look upon a certificate of deposit with a feeling of respect

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they are far from according to any genealogical tree or pedigree of noble race.

On 'change, bankers and financiers are the lords and dukes, as poor Armand found to the cost of his susceptibility; at least so he wrote to Lèonie, who wondered at it all, and thought bankers or any other moneyed men or corporations, great dunces for not at once falling at the Duke's feet and offering him situations and gold to any extent. But I must admit that her estimation of the Duke was a most inordinate one —a strict sense of justice compels me to make this avowal.

Lèonie and the Count attended a bull fight which took place at Bayonne. The Countess and Hortense remained at home; they had no desire to witness a spectacle which to them seemed most barbarous. Lèonie quite agreed with them upon that subject, but acknowledged that she would like to go, as she had never seen a bull fight, and wished for once, just for once, to get an idea of what it was like. So the Count could but offer to gratify her curiosity, and they went. For a description of the affair I will refer my readers to the following letter addressed to the Duke de la Rocheconstant by Lèonie. She corresponded regularly with him, and had given some new and quite original ideas upon all the places they had visited.

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"DEAR ARMAND,

"I have already given you much valuable information since we parted, have corrected many errors set afloat by former travellers, and have done a great deal to make you comprehend the real state of affairs usually much misrepresented. Since my last letter I have added to my experience, having actually (don't shudder) witnessed a bull fight. There now, no exclamation please, as of how unwomanly, how indelicate, how could she go to such a barbarous exhibition; so cruel, etc., etc. You need write me no such things, as I have made up my mind to burn up your next letter without reading it: so you may easily comprehend that your sermonizing will be thrown away. But *revenons à nos taureaux.*

"An immense amphitheatre was erected in a square in the city, and at a given hour the Count and myself having entered it, found ourselves among some seven or eight thousand people. This large number was a source of gratification to me, as if it was a sin to go to such a place, there were so many to divide the blame, the share of each was infinitesimal. Having thus given you the assurance that I did have some misgiving upon the morality of going, I proceed.

"As soon as we were seated, a trumpet sounded, which I supposed was a flourish of welcome to us—that overjoyed at having among them the future Duchess de la Rocheconstant, they had given vent to their gratification; but I was mistaken, a man came

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forward, looked not at our box but at one further along; in fact, towards that occupied by the prefect, and having bowed and gesticulated, he proceeded to open a gate, when in entered a bull, whose horns, I noticed, were from a wise foresight padded. The animal, once in the arena, seemed to have all manner of objection to making a spectacle of himself, so having calmly surveyed the crowd of people gazing at him, he stalked back towards his stall. At this moment, when I must say the interest of the whole affair seemed decreasing, a number of gentlemen in fancy costumes sprang into the ring and walked towards the retiring bull. He stopped to look at them, whereupon they all with remarkable agility sprang out of the ring only to come into it again, when the bull seemed more and more bent upon modestly retreating from the public gaze. Coming near the bull, one of the masqueraders most cruelly, as I thought, stuck a small javelin or lance into the poor beast's back, which he resented by throwing the man down and trampling upon his stomach to his great and evident discomfort. This accident seemed to discourage the gentlemen in fancy costumes, who now gave way to an equal number of North American Indians, or persons dressed in that appropriate costume. I say appropriate, as I think none but savages should participate in such an affair. These new comers stuck the poor bull's neck full of arrows, causing him to bleed and suffer greatly, after which the unlucky beast was allowed to leave the

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ring. It being supposed, as the Count informed me, that by this time the spectators were ready to witness more serious work, another flourish of trumpets was given and the same man appeared as before, and as before gesticulated and bowed; after which he opened the gate, and another bull, a huge yellow one, rushed into the arena. This time it was evident that mischief was meant, as the bull's horns, which were long and pointed, were not padded. Two cavaliers entered the ring, and galloping up to the bull, goaded him with long spears. This rendered him furious, and he dashed at them most vindictively. They received him on the points of their lances, which dreadfully wounded him, so much so, that losing all desire for the fray, he rushed to the railings, and cleared them at a leap. The audience, much excited, hissed the poor prudent beast, and calling it by all sorts of insulting epithets, loudly demanded that it should be forced back into the ring. This was done, and once more the bull received thrusts from spears and arrows; but all in vain. He was dreadfully cowed, and would make no show of fighting, so the irate multitude loudly clamoured for his death.

"Now commenced a most disgusting butchery, and at this point of my narrative I grant you that females should never patronize bull fights. The *espada*—I believe that is the proper term—who was to execute the poor beast, was, from some cause—inexperience most likely—so awkward, as to deal the

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bull at least twenty deep thrusts with the long sharp sword he carried without striking a vital place. The excitement of the spectators baffles my poor powers of description. They cursed the espada, shouted at him, until the man seemed to have lost all consciousness of his task; he looked wildly around at the surging mass, waived his arms as if in despair, and was finally dragged out by some of his comrades, who seemed to compassionate his unlucky position. As the poor espada withdrew a shower of canes and pieces of chairs, broken during the excitement, were flung upon him—amid groans and hisses he disappeared. The bull was most ignominiously despatched, a man creeping up behind him and planting a dagger in his neck. But now once more did the trumpet sound, the gates open, and in rushed a fierce black bull, who began his campaign by killing outright a poor little horse. The animal fell, and its rider rolled to the feet of the bull! The man remained as still as death, while a painful hush came over the great multitude; a struggle made by the dying horse attracted the bull's attention, it moved away, and the man, rising to his feet, walked slowly off. He was evidently much shaken by his fall. The bull continued its prowess, and knocked the horses and men about in gallant style. Poor creature, its courage and activity were of no avail, the blood-thirsty spectators called out loudly for the death-stroke, and in answer to this generally-expressed desire, an espada

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made his appearance. He walked up to the stand occupied by the presiding officer, and addressed him in a short speech, making known his intention of conquering or dying, I suppose, as his gestures were most animated, and as loud exclamations from the crowd greeted its close.

"Taking a large red cloak and the long sharp sword, the man entered the ring. It was at once evident that the man was much more *au fait* than his unfortunate predecessor. He evinced great steadiness and courage, rushing up to the now terribly-enraged bull, and sticking a cockade between his horns, he jumped over the animal's head, thus escaping a thrust which must otherwise have proved fatal. Cheers arose on all sides as he settled himself for the fatal blow: waiving his red mantle, he attracted the bull's attention, which rushed upon him so suddenly, that he had but time to spring aside, leaving the mantle under its hoofs. He now gave a startling sample of his address and courage. Taking his handkerchief from his pocket, he waived it before the incensed brute, which dashed viciously at him. He firmly awaited the charge, and planted the whole length of the sword between the bull's shoulders, killing the animal instantly. Had his aim faltered, or the blow failed to kill, his own life would have been the forfeit. The applause which greeted his success was immense, hats, handkerchiefs, purses, and cigars by handsfull were thrown into the ring, while the cheers became

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deafening. Heart-sick and disgusted, we left, and I may safely promise you, dear Armand, that never again will I attend so brutal an exhibition. The people here say that the Empress Eugenie is fond of such spectacles, but I dare say that this is an erroneous statement." The rest of the letter I will spare my readers, as it contained a lot of what I call nonsense, although it is but fair to admit that Armand had quite a different opinion upon the subject.

It has been said above, that Hortense had once again given way to deep dejection and melancholy. Her parents became more and more alarmed as the colour faded again from her cheeks and she became listless and unhappy. Like the sensitive plant, which shrinks within itself if rudely touched—so her heart, at the grip of sorrow, was contracting at the expense of her young life. The plant once crushed, in vain endeavours to open its petals to the warm rays of the sun, a swift decay, a sure death has overtaken it, and die it must. So with her young heart, sorrow and grief, wounded susceptibility and pride, were all contracting it beyond the power of affection's sun-like rays. Mingled with her love for Mortimer was a feeling of deep shame and dejection, of fear, for judging Sydney's feelings by her own, she dreaded he might have impiously ended his life rather than have survived the dishonour of one he dearly loved. This may be deemed an exaggeration of sentiment, but it must be borne in mind that Hortense had never

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mingled with girls of her own age, knew nought of the world save from her books, and that she had imbibed from her mother's teachings an almost superlative love of honour and probity. It was this fact which made her mother the more appreciate the sacrifice her child had made for her at the time she took upon herself the shame she feared was her mother's. Hortense thought that the belief in *her* guilt had rendered Mortimer wild with shame and grief, and that he had forever separated from them, that perhaps he had even himself ended his life. This dreadful thought was killing her. All her mother's persuasions to the contrary were useless.

"Where is he? where can he have gone then?" said Hortense. "No one has heard from him, not even his brother whom he dearly loved. Ah, mother, I—I am to blame, I am the cause of whatever misfortune may have overtaken him." Her diseased mind was killing her body. The Count was in despair, the most celebrated physician in Paris had been written to, and had come to Biarritz. He at once pronounced the disease one of the mind, of the heart, not of the body, and beyond the doctor's skill. The father and mother were indeed broken-hearted. What was to be done? All efforts to find Sydney had failed.

The day after the doctor's visit, they were all seated in the drawing-room reading or writing. The Count's letters and papers had just been brought from the post. Mechanically Hortense picked up the "*Inde-*

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*pendance Belge*," and cast her eyes over its pages. A moment after, her parents heard a low moan, and looking up, saw Hortense falling to the floor. She was quite insensible—having fainted, and being to all appearance lifeless. Her hand grasped tightly the journal she had been reading. The Count took it out of her fingers, while her mother and Lèonie were endeavouring to bring her to her senses. He glanced over the page, and discovered the cause of his daughter's agitation. Among a list of the names of English officers killed in China while attacking a fort, he read as follows:

"Sydney Mortimer, an English gentleman who joined the forces as volunteer, fell mortally wounded while leading on the men to the attack. His daring and gallant conduct had attracted the attention of the whole army. We understand that Mr. Mortimer belonged to a wealthy and influential family. His relations and friends, though deploring his untimely fate, may feel proud of his having died in his country's cause and for his country's honour."

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## CHAPTER XX.

BON SANG NE PEUT MENTIR; OR, BLOOD WILL TELL.

THE first shock of this painful news once over, Hortense was surprised to find herself happier—more calm. Her self-accusation was less acute. She felt assured that but for her Sydney had never gone to join the army, yet mingled with this thought was the knowledge of her innocence and the assurance that he had not perished by his own hand. She made a powerful effort for the sake of her parents, determining she would become resigned to the event, and that the rest of her days should be devoted to that dear mother who was now grieved and heart-stricken by this unforeseen stroke of Providence. Poor child, she was young to become thus marshalled among the ranks of Sorrow's Own, but so 'tis in many cases in this fair pleasant world of ours. The young, the innocent, the gay, careless beginners in life, are overwhelmed by deep grief and sorrow, ere the first taste of pleasure has palled upon the lips, while the older,



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the more guilty, the selfish, the inordinate seekers after gratification, go on sinning and transgressing, having seemingly attached themselves to Fortune's chariot, Providence overlooking them to pour upon the inoffensive and good, showers of life's ill-luck and grief. Of a surety, the ways of the world are strange, and man's fate bewilderingly uncertain, and seemingly unfair.

Poor little Lèonie, their stand-by for gaiety and light-heartedness, was becoming sadly overcast. Armand's letters betrayed disappointment and annoyance. His title, which was to open the gates of Mammon's temple to his first knock, had failed most signally in so doing, and he was beginning to comprehend that the days of steel, of barbed knights, of chivalrous enterprises, and noble actions, had passed away, and that gold—*cash*, now reigned supreme, its possessor having at his beck and call the best of nature's qualities, the noblest of her handiwork to serve him. His letters were becoming more sad as he came more in contact with the human nature of the day. The cold, hard, commercial, vicious, speculating nature of the age; when men, for an object, be it a great one, may lie and prevaricate, may state this thing and do the other, the world excusing their bad faith and want of honesty on the score of expediency. And these examples are not the lesser ones; oh no, as Armand wrote to his Lèonie, 'twas those set on high, the shining marks that were the *most ex-*

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*pedient.* Poor little woman, she began to repine, even went so far as to advise Armand's accepting a political post under the present administration, although she knew he was a Legitimist, and that to remain true to the traditions of his family, he could accept nothing from the Government. But when she made the suggestion she was sad and caught at a straw. Armand's answer grieved her, for it betrayed that she had wounded him. "I cannot do what you advise. I have served the Government as a soldier; yes, but then a soldier has no political opinion, knows but his duty, and recognizes as personal enemies those of his country." She wrote him a long, loving, penitential letter in answer, and got in return one filled with assurances which gladdened her fond heart.

Lèonie was an intrepid bather, and indulged after her sea baths in a long walk on the cliffs, to bring about, as she said, a reaction. Now this in principle is very well, but unluckily she carried it to extremes, so that one evening while running about the hillsides, with a young English girl, with whom she had become acquainted, and whose society she much affected, they were caught in a violent storm of rain and were drenched. Lèonie took cold—and was kept in bed quite ill for several days. One evening as she was recovering, the Count, Countess, and Hortense accepted an invitation to pass the evening at the house of the Prefect, Lèonie having threatened if they did not she would

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go herself, and be the life of the assemblage. They left, and contrary to the doctor's orders, she at once rose and went into the drawing-room. She was tired, she affirmed to herself, of her bedroom, and would get up. The fact is, she was nervous and vexed. She had not received Armand's daily letter, and began, of course, to imagine he was cooling in his affection, or, else, and the thought made her shudder, he was ill. She went into the drawing-room, which was not lighted, and seated herself near the window. Here she reflected and sighed, and managed to get herself into a most desponding mood; she was tired of the delay. Armand was too delicate in the matter, was positively unkind. She would marry some dreadfully ugly humpbacked old man if only to spite him. He knew she loved him, was sure of her affection, and yet Monsieur chose to make her love wait upon his vanity; she was angry, was annoyed, loved him no longer, and was, in fact, getting ready to have a good cry, when she saw a form cross the garden in front of the house, and heard a step near the door. Who could it be? the person had entered the garden gate without ringing; it was, perhaps, the Count, perhaps a thief; she was no coward, so walked into the hall just in time to meet the intruder, who, to her intense astonishment, at once enveloped her in a hearty embrace. It was a silent one, however, and to her shame, be it said, she did not, until after several struggles to get away, discover that her captor was

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Armand. Then she did cry, and behave altogether in a manner unworthy of herself, letting that naughty man see how much she loved him. He seemed so lost to all sense of female reserve and delicacy as to immensely like the kisses and affectionate hugs she bestowed upon him. I must do her the justice to admit, however, that the next day she attributed her expansion of feeling to the hysterical condition into which her illness had thrown her, and not to any excess of affection; which statement Armand was so impolite as to flatly contradict.

"Dear Armand," sobbed the little creature, "have you come but to go away again; or will you remain with us? have you given up your researches after employment, or are you determined to break my heart, by continuing to seek after that which we do not need?"

"I have come here, dearest, to ask your advice upon a most grave subject."

"A grave subject," said Lèonie, with a sparkle in her eyes, that reminded Armand of the days when he first saw her.

"Yes, grave," said he.

She became serious at once. "What was it?"

"I am placed in a peculiar position. Monsieur de Saint Lo, who is affianced, as you know, to my sister, has returned to Paris, having successfully terminated his mission. He has been made a Senator and Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour by the Emperor, who

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is gratified at his having so well fulfilled the duties entrusted to him. My sister informed him that all matters of contract, and so forth, would be explained to him by my solicitor. M. de Saint Lo saw the solicitor, and then came to me. 'Armand,' said he, 'do you believe that I love your sister, as she deserves to be loved.' 'I do,' said I; for I could see in his face that he adored her. 'Well, then, you will please to understand that Clotilde and myself will not allow you to despoil yourself of your estates to endow her with a marriage portion. She did not know the extent of the sacrifice you were about to make for her, and declares that she will not accept it, will not marry me in fact. Now, my dear Armand, as I cannot live without your sister, cannot be deprived of her love, you must, at once, promise me to keep your estates, and let me marry your sister without any dowry, save the priceless treasure of her affection. If you refuse me, there is but one course left; I must challenge you to mortal combat: it is a matter of keep your purse, or give me your life.' Now, Lèonie, in this sore straight, dearest, I have hastened to ask your advice; must I keep my estates or fight this man?"

She understood it all; he was now free; they could now marry. With a sigh of relief, she fell upon his breast and wept vehemently. The Count and Countess, upon their returning home, were astonished to find Lèonie, whom they had left in bed, walking

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in the garden with a gentleman, whom to their delight they found was Armand.

When it was known that all obstacle to the marriage was removed, Lèonie underwent a great deal of kissing and embracing on the part of the Countess and Hortense; she said it was nonsense; but the tears in her eyes and the bloom on her cheek proved that it was at any rate very agreeable nonsense. As for the Duke, he walked about with the air and demeanour of a man thoroughly happy; and so he was. He acknowledged to Lèonie that he was not at all sorry he was not now obliged to obtain a Directorship of any Company or Corporation, as he had seen enough of them to consider it a good fortune to keep clear from any such questionable position. She quite coincided with him, and said some silly things about his gentle blood forbiding his seeking employment, that she would rather work for *him*, than that he should for *her*, with a great lot of like trash which I will not repeat. The fact is, she was very much in love, and not quite responsible for what she did or said just then. It was decided they should at once return to Paris, as the Duke was anxious they should get married on the same day that his sister's wedding was to take place. He expressed to the de Frissacs, and to Hortense especially, his deep regret at Sydney's fate. He had loved him much; saw much in his character to admire and esteem; out of regard for Hortense, he dwelt upon the fact of his having met

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so glorious a death in terms calculated to soothe any self-reproach she might feel.

They all went to Paris, and upon the same day Armand and Léonie, as well as Monsieur de St. Lo and Clotilde, Armand's sister, were married at the Madeleine. As usual upon such occasions, the church was filled with beautifully-dressed ladies, friends of both parties, while among the gentlemen were many of Armand's comrades in the army. It is useless attempting any description of the ceremony. On this occasion, as at all grand weddings, the organ pealed forth exquisite music, melodious voices rang through the sacred edifice, while outside hundreds of carriages, the footmen and drivers wearing nosegays and white favours, were stationed, the whole surrounded by a mob; a quiet French mob, which did not even quiz the servants, let alone addressing remarks of an equivocal nature to the principals in the affair.

All passed off most pleasantly, and as the bride was being handed into her carriage, she had the pleasure of saying something amiable to her former admirers at Chateau Frissac. They were all present, in full dress, and to the last they pressed around the Duchess, with as much ardour as when she was the centre of attraction for them at the Chateau. They did look somewhat disconsolate as the carriage bearing her drove away; but the shadow was soon dispelled. They thought of the charming reunions she would give during the coming season, in that grand old house in the Quartier St. Germain, and that they

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might then, as before, revolve around her. The thought chased away their melancholy, and they all three went to breakfast at the Café Anglais, where they drank her health so many times, that at last their admiration of her, as she had appeared in her rich wedding-dress, became quite maudlin. They were three nice, inoffensive young men, and I take my leave of them with every feeling of friendship.

Armand and Lèonie went off to England; they were to make the tour of Scotland and Ireland before returning to Paris. Monsieur de St. Lo, with his newly-wedded wife, who already loved dearly her brother's Lèonie, went to Switzerland. The old Duchess de la Rocheconstant saw her children depart with regret; but they were soon to come back to her. She gladdened the heart of our dear Lèonie by seeming as affectionately anxious for *her* return as that of any of them, and kissed the little parvenu fervently as she bade her adieu.

The Count and Countess judged that in constant action, in constant change, lay the remedy for Hortense's melancholy and depression; so it was decided they should go to Malta, and from thence, at the proper season, to Palestine. Their intention was to journey quietly, stopping often to rest their daughter from the fatigues of travelling. They remained several days at Lyons, and then went on to Marseilles, where it was decided they should stay some time, as Hortense seemed averse to any further movement.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

### PER ANGUSTA AD AUGUSTA.

The de Frissacs remained for months at Marseilles. Every time the Count spoke of taking their departure Hortense was so earnest in begging not to be removed, that her entreaties prevailed. She had become a confirmed invalid, and was rarely able to leave the house. She remained extended upon a lounge placed near a window, from which she had a view of the sea; and for days and days she gazed listlessly over the broad expanse of blue water stretching as far as the horizon. She was dreamily passing her life away.

The Count was a changed man. His affection for his wife seemed to increase as her care and anxiety for her daughter became more and more intense; and could that dear being but have recovered health and strength, the Countess's happiness would have been complete.

News came of the victory gained by the allies in China, flags were hung out, cannons were fired; but

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the noise and gaiety were irksome to the invalid; she thought of one whom neither the cannon's roar nor shouts of victory could awaken from his last deep sleep, and shuddered as she said to herself, "His death lies at my door."

On the steamer that brought the news from the seat of war came a number of French and English officers, who were sent home disabled from wounds received in battle. Several of them stopped at the hotel occupied by the de Frissacs. Whenever Hortense saw any of these as they crept about on crutches, or with arms in slings, pale and wan, she thought of Sydney with a tenderness tinged with remorse. She longed to ask the officers whether they had known him—had met him before his death; but she kept this desire from her parents. She knew that any mention of Sydney pained them, as they wished her to forget a subject so fraught with grief and unhappiness to her, and she refrained. But for days the desire grew upon her, until at last she spoke to the Countess upon the subject. Her mother, who saw how much the idea had taken possession of her mind, told the Count of his daughter's desire. After some demurring he consented to seek one of the officers, and beg of him to visit them, so that Hortense might question him upon a matter she had so much at heart. He was disappointed to find that they had, one after the other, taken their departure, with the exception of an English officer, who had been very ill,

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but was so far recovered he had left his room that very day.

"He is now in the garden, I believe," said the landlord.

"Will you see this gentleman, and ask him to call upon my ladies, when he comes in?" said the Count, having vainly sought him in the grounds before the house.

The landlord said he should not fail to do so, and the Count went out. A few moments after, the young officer was met by a servant whom the landlord had charged with attending to the Count's desire. To the inquiry as to whether he would please call upon some ladies who wished for information he might be able to give them, the officer at once acquiesced, and was preceded to the drawing-room by the servant, who, finding the Countess and Hortense in, threw open the door, announcing:

"The gentleman whom Madame la Comtesse asked for."

The gentleman walked into the room, which was darkened by the drawing of the heavy curtains; the Countess rose to pull them back, and was startled while so doing by hearing a loud exclamation from Hortense; she turned towards her, saw her rise, totter across the room, and fall at the feet of—Sydney Mortimer!

Yes, it was indeed Sydney. Left for dead upon the battle-field, he was discovered to be still alive by

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some Chinese labourers who were burying the bodies of those who had fallen; they carried him to the hospital, where he remained for some time before it was ascertained at head-quarters he had not perished. His recovery was slow, and as soon as he could be moved he was sent home with a number of other wounded officers. During the voyage, which was a rough one, some of his wounds opened afresh, so that when he arrived at Marseilles he was so ill he was forced to remain several days in his bed—he had only risen that day. His manner to Hortense was so respectfully affectionate as to fill her heart with joy. She felt that, with his honest nature, he would not act thus towards her, did he not feel for her a real esteem; the thought gave her unbounded pleasure; in every word, in every look she betrayed her love. But a maiden's coyness kept her from too great a demonstration of her happiness. She now, too, remembered that Sydney had never assured her verbally of his love. She felt sure he did love her; but, as yet, he had not said so. To the Countess's inquiries in relation to his not having made known to his brother his whereabouts, Sydney assured her he had written to him the day he had made up his mind to go to China. He felt much grieved when he heard that his letter had never been received, and that for months they had sought for him everywhere. He expressed no surprise at his brother's having thus sought for him,

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although he might well have asked them why *they* had been so anxious as to what had become of him.

The Count was astounded and delighted to find Sydney seated between the Countess and Hortense, holding a hand of each, with a look of joyous happiness beaming from his eyes. He had just told Hortense, in presence of her mother, how much he loved her, and had received in return the assurance that he had all her affection. She was as frank as himself, untutored in the ways of the world, and thought it no lack of maiden modesty to acknowledge to him how much she had grieved for him. No word was said about the regretful scene that had taken place at Chateau Frissac the night before his departure. It was an unpleasant subject for Hortense and her mother, and neither cared to broach it. The Countess was determined that Sydney should know the truth, but she intended telling him when Hortense was not present.

Sydney at once telegraphed to his brother his safe arrival, and announced his approaching marriage, the Count having given his cordial assent. None of them seemed to have a thought now for Hortense's state of ill health, she seemed so gay, so full of animation. It was evident she was fast recovering her strength; her cheerful spirits came back at a bound. Was he not there safe and well? He for whom she had so much grieved, for whose death she had felt responsible. It seemed to her as if he were a thousand times

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handsomer and better than she had before thought. She had suffered so much on his account; had had but one preoccupation until the fatal news of his death reached her, that to be reinstated in his mind, to regain his respect, was indeed joy. Ah, it was a blissful change, she was truly happy! She saw that her mother was equally so; this was apparent in every action of the Countess, who looked ten years younger, and was almost coquettish in the details of her toilette, to the loudly-expressed admiration of the Count, who seemed to be for the first time aware of how great a treasure he possessed.

Madame la Duchesse de la Rocheconstant did, it is true, endeavour to dash all this happiness to the earth by writing to Hortense that it was all a mistake; that the Sydney she had found was one *à la mécanique*, made by her father's orders; but in this vile attempt she signally failed, as Hortense received the startling statement with the most uncompromising incredulity. In due time Sydney received a long letter from his brother, whose researches for him had been unceasing. His sister-in-law Sarah had died a few months past, leaving his brother childless. He besought Sydney to have the wedding take place at the Hall where they were born, and which in course of time would be Sydney's, as his brother was determined he would never marry again. He wished Sydney and his bride to make the Hall their home at once. The Count and Countess thought it best they

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should get married in Paris, and from thence go to England. They were by no means willing that Hortense should take up her residence at Mortimer Hall, abandoning altogether Chateau Frissac. It was decided that her time should be equally divided between the two places.

As in the case of Lèonie, I will not attempt any description of the wedding, which was like all others. Sydney, his bride, and his brother Henry, who had come to Paris to be present at the ceremony, went off to England, whither they were followed, in a few days, by the Count and Countess.

One evening, while they were all seated upon the lawn in front of the fine old Hall, the Countess began an explanation to Sydney of the occurrence which had driven him to join the forces in China.

He arrested her by saying, "Oh, I know all about that, and it is thus I learnt that my dear wife was an angel of goodness worthy of my adoration, where before I thought her lost to me forever. Making an attack upon an outpost of the enemy the day before I was so badly wounded, I rushed on so recklessly as to find myself enveloped by a score of Chinese warriors, who would soon have cut me to pieces, when I was joined by a French soldier, who dashed at the enemy with such desperation as to hold them in check until others came to our assistance; to him I owed my life. I had fallen on my knees, having received a blow on the head which almost deprived

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me of my senses. Standing by me and fighting like a hero, the Frenchman saved me from certain death. As others came to the rescue he fell to the ground mortally wounded. I raised him up. He looked upon me, and in the dying man I recognized one whom we have all looked upon as a friend. He knew me, convulsively grasped my hand, spoke of past days, told me a tale which chased away my grief, which caused my heart to bound with joy and happiness—told me, dear lady, that very tale you were just upon the point of relating—begged me to sue for the pardon of those he had wronged, should I ever see them again, and then with a pressure of the hand that grew more and more feeble, Morlot died in my arms."

THE END.

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> "Dower'd with the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn,
> The love of love;"

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